







Kanade Suzutsuki

涼月奏

スバルの主のお嬢様  
学園の理事長の一人娘。

「何なりと  
お申し付けください。」  
主人様」

Kureha Sakamachi

坂町紅羽

近次郎の妹。兄と格闘技が大好き。

「にやつ……にやんで  
近衛先輩が  
家にいるんですか?」

Kinjiro Sakamachi

坂町近次郎

主人公。女性恐怖症の体質に  
偏食されている。

「は?」

Subaru Konoe

近衛スバル

男装の美少女。執事として  
働に仕えている。

「ボクはこの家の  
シローの執事になる。」

まよ  
手ギ!







# Chapter 1: A Butler Came To My Home

The first day of May, a day probably everybody knows about—Golden Week. Indeed, today, the 1st of May, is right in the middle of Golden Week. Thinking about it, the first half of the holidays feels so much in the distant past now, but I'll avert my eyes from this depressing reality.

After all—everything starts now. My Golden Week starts today. It's definitely not a belated start. As proof for this, my tension was as high as if this was the last day of the Awa Odori festival in Tokushima. As a matter of fact, I haven't even slept a wink since last night. My inner engine was revving up to the point where my body couldn't keep up.

Calmly, I observed the clock in my room. The time of day was half past 8am. Soon it would happen—**She** would come over. Calmly as ever, but with the posture of a short-distance runner waiting for the pistol shot, I sat in my bed. We all know the established morning practice of the Sakamachi Family. The human-shaped alarm clock that would come in like a storm would soon pull open the curtains on this radiating, golden-colored week of mine...!

“Gud moooooorninguuu, Nii-san!”

Together with an energetic voice, the door to my room opened at a speed that made me worried that she may have destroyed it. Standing in the doorway was a cheerful girl with dazzling short hair, wearing stylish black sportswear. She possessed a small physique resembling a tiny animal, but large eyes despite that, and a smile strong enough to illuminate the night sky—Sakamachi Kureha. Yet again, perfectly on time, my little sister arrived.

“Daryaaaa!”

She let out an excited voice, and dashed towards my learning desk in

the room. She used that as a stepping stool, and...landed a backflip!?

“...!”

In the world of pro-wrestling, this was the initiation of a beautiful technique known by everybody. After jumping into the air, you turn 270° backwards. Her body barely touched the ceiling, as she drew a beautiful arc. And then, she screamed—mid-air, of course.

“The parabola her posture of a crescent moon drew was the bridge to glory!”

No, that most definitely ain’t wrestling. Also, why does her choice of words sound so old-fashioned? My inner retort was met with silence, and at the same time as her body overlapped with mine, looking like an X in mid-air—

“Gueh!?”

I was hit by a moonsault press, also known as a *getsumen suiboku*. Her slender body rammed right into my abdomen, without the smallest error.

“Yaaay! Morning, Nii-san!”

“M-Morning, Kureha...”

I somehow managed to keep my breathing under control, giving back a somewhat calm greeting to my little sister...Well, you know. It might be a shock, but this indeed is my usual daily life. As I was born into a family of pro-wrestling skill maniacs, lead by my mother, I’ve been used as their training tool and punching bag for the past ten years and more.

What is most problematic is that she had absolutely no bad intent about this. You know what I mean, right? Look at an animal trainer at an aquarium, suffering an injury because an orca was just playful and clinging to them. Basically, this is the exact same. Taking this example, the battle strength of me and Kureha is pretty much the same between a human and an orca. To her, she’s just enjoying her days with her older brother, but to me it’s pretty much a battle to the death every single day.

As a result of this, whenever my little sister would appear, my oasis and sleeping place turned into a blood-drenched wrestling ring, which is closely related to my disposition—Gynophobia.

Ever since I was five years old, I was treated as a punching bag by my mother and little sister, which was too much for the young me, so I ended up becoming unable to deal with just being touched by another girl. Putting it down simply, despite not even feeling excited about touching or being touched by a girl, my nose would start bleeding. My body would just react on its own.

And of course, this wasn't the end of my torture. From here on out—I'll be the one trained by my little sister until even the blood running down my nose will have dried up fully...!

“Ehehe, Nii-san~”

However, today, my little sister was different from usual. Normally, she'd move on right to the next pro-wrestling skill, but she instead tightly clung to my body...

“...H-Hey, Kureha?”

This being completely against anything I had experienced before, I couldn't relax at all. However, no response came, and only silence followed. Her small arms wrapped around my waist, as she simply leaned against me. If anything, like a small cat, she rubbed her cheeks against my chest.

“.....”

This is bad. Seriously, I'd probably be more at ease if she just woke me up like she usually would...This is removing my sleepiness in a different way. Her body was barely weighing anything, as it leaned against me. Something soft and spongy pressed onto me, with the sweet aroma of shampoo reaching my nose. Although she's my little sister, she also undoubtedly is a girl.



That's why—this is dangerous. I felt shivers on my skin, and my nose was growing hot. No doubt, the symptoms of my gynophobia were activating. At this rate, I'll get a nosebleed again, and faint—

“...Mm, I guess this should be enough.” Right as my consciousness was getting dangerously close to cutting out, Kureha jumped off the bed. “Thanks, Nii-san.”



“...What was that about?” I was trying hard to get my breathing back under control, as I asked her.

That was mighty dangerous. Two seconds more of that, and I probably would have passed out. Listening to my question, Kureha slightly tilted her head.

“Um...Put simply, I was charging?”

“Charging?”

“Yup. I won’t be able to see you for a while, so that I don’t end up lonely, I was recharging my Nii-san Energy with a long hug.”

“Nii-san Energy...”

“Nyahaha. Thanks for the food. Now I’m fully charged. With this, I can reach even the limits of our galaxy!”

“.....”

Doing something embarrassing like that...Are you some space battleship?

“And...What do you think, Nii-san? Does this jersey look good?”  
Kureha showed off her clothes, as she twirled on the spot.

It was a new sports wear I hadn’t seen on her before. If you ask me, it looks like a jersey belonging to some sports club at a school. If you ignored the imprint on her back, saying ‘Rouran Academy Handicrafts Club’, that is. When I asked her why she was wearing this at such a time this early in the morning, she told me that the handicrafts club would go on a 3 days 2 nights training camp in the mountains.

I mean, I was wondering why a handicrafts club would need a jersey, but there were so many points to retort on, I ignored most of it—except the part of the training camp. Not to mention for three days and two nights. That would mean Kureha won’t be home at this time...In other words...

“...Eh? N-Nii-san, are you...crying?”

“A-Ah...well...I was just...overcome with emotion for a second...” I said, and took off my glasses in order to wipe my tears.

Even so, those hot drops of water would not stop streaming down my cheeks. Ahh, how many years has it been since I cried simply out of joy?

“I see...I’m sorry I never realized. You must be lonely when I’m gone for my training camp, right?”

“As if. Just go already.”

“You don’t need to act so strong, Nii-san~”

“I’m not. Want to test it with a lie detector?”

“Make sure to properly watch over the house. I’ll bring some souvenirs with me.”

“I don’t need anything like that...Also, who even does a training camp in the mountains in this day and age?”

Even Buddhists and martial artists don’t, do they? Not to mention we’re still talking about the handicrafts club. What would you even do at a mountain? Make some embroidered patches with what nature gives you?

“Well, we actually got a request from the people living close to the mountain.”

“A request?”

““A bear that woke up from its hibernation is turning our fields into a mess! Please take care of that!”, they said.”

“Why not ask the local hunting club for that!?”

“Well, our handicrafts club is just that strong, so it can’t be helped.”

“What’s that even supposed to mean? Even some karate club who won the national tournament wouldn’t get a request like that.”

They're crazy. I thought about this before, but our handicrafts club is defying any kind of common sense. Rather than this being some training camp, you're going hunting in the mountains, aren't you.

"Hey, is your club doing alright? Doesn't sound like you're a proper club at all."

"Proper club?"

"I mean, wouldn't a handicrafts club...work on embroidery, knitting, and making like plush toys or whatever..."

"Like hunting yankees?"

"Yeah, yeah...Wait, yankee hunting!?"

You do that!? The handicrafts club is!? Hunting yankees!?

"This is pretty embarrassing~ We're just cleaning up the town a bit."

"Don't make it sound like you're doing volunteer work! You'll only get hurt!"

"Nya? Nii-san, are you worried?"

"Of course I am. About the yankees."

Kureha vs Yankee, it's like you're aiming a rocket launcher at a nest of ants. It'll be a one-sided slaughter.

"Anyway, Nii-san, I better get going now."

"Yeah yeah, make sure you don't end up as bear food."

"Aye, understoods~"

Energetically waving her hand, Kureha headed towards the door. Ahh, finally, the life I had always dreamed of finally was right in front of me. Such freedom, I'll be able to experience a peaceful life utterly different from the hell I had to live through until now!

"—Ah, I forgot to tell you." Kureha turned around, right before leaving the room.

She took out a red apple from her pocket. Didn't we get sent this one and many more from our relatives in Aomori?

"Nii-san, you're not allowed to invite any girl home while I'm gone, okay? If you were to ignore my words..." She put strength in her fingers...

Wait hold on!? T-The apple! She squashed it in an instant!?

"This will happen, so remember that, okay?" Kureha showed a smile, as she licked her fingers full of apple juice.

...I won't. I won't dare to bring a girl home. I looked at the crushed apple, and swore to myself with these words.

"So then, I'll be leaving, Nii-san. I'll feed you some bear meat once I get home, so look forward to it!" She waved her hand yet again, and left my room.

Slowly after, I heard the front door opening, reaching all the way up to the second floor.

"Haa...finally gone, huh." I let out a sigh, and looked below my bed.

And no, I wasn't going to enjoy myself with my porn magazines that I was hiding from my little sister. Last month, Kureha found all of them here, so I had to move my secret stash to the second layer of my second drawer in my learning desk. On top of that, I doubt that Kureha would have found my lethal weapon in the other secret spot beneath my bed. With a bit of work, I took it out—A white vinyl bag. Inside of that was were round objects—

Cup ramen. Not to mention that it's the Ace\*ook Super \*up. This is my greatest and final weapon!

"....."

Well, you know. I'm aware that I'm just blurting out nonsense, but this cup of cup ramen is a greater fortune to me than you could imagine. After all, the only food at home right now are apples. Last month, we lived off kimchi, but at the end of April—right before we came into Golden Week, we shifted to apples.

‘I’ve been gaining a bit of weight as of late, so I’ll be switching to an apple diet.’

With that single phrase, my daily food and nourishment took a big turn south. An apple diet sure is great, really. I’m losing weight so quickly, I could become a lightweight boxer soon. My cheeks are slowly turning carved in even. That being the case, cup ramen time. Of course, some of you might look down on me, saying that I could just buy that from the convenience store whenever I felt like it, but it ain’t that easy.

The little monster in my family, Sakamachi Kureha, absolutely hates cup ramen. Saying that it’s an awful balance, or something like that. If she’s going to throw in that argument, then only eating kimchi and apples for a week is even more unbalanced, but I sadly don’t have the right for such a logical argument. This Sakamachi Family is like a savannah, where the strong reign over the weak. Basically, my position here is comparable to an early Japanese Christian back in the Edo period.

I really wanted to eat out at times, but my financial situation didn’t allow me to do such a thing either, so I bought emergency rations in the shape of cup ramen. I don’t particularly mind of course, I love cup ramen. To the point where I was looking forward to this day.

Now then, time to boil up some water. Once I’m full, I’ll go to bed again. It’ll completely mess up my rhythm, but that won’t hurt. Youth shall be forgiven in the eyes of god. Ahh, what freedom, what luxury. My blissful Golden Week has already started. Without the demon around, I am just your average adolescent boy. With that thought in mind, I tried to leave my room—

**Tra la la la la~**

The ringtone of my phone interrupted me. The melody of said ringtone was none other than the theme of the movie ‘The Godfather’.

“Urk.”

Unwillingly, I stopped in my tracks. I set up this ringtone for only a



single individual out there—Suzutsuki Kanade. She's the class president of my class, and the single daughter of our school's board chairman, a fully-fledged and authentic rich lady. However, in reality, she is a wolf wearing sheep's clothing. She's wearing the suit of an honor student, but inside, she's a cold-blooded komodo dragon. To speak the truth, ever since I've become a second-year, my days have been pretty much hell.

I almost drowned at a leisure land, was beaten to a pulp by a kidnapper, almost got killed by a classmate and my little sister...it was rough, let me tell you. And, this young lady was involved in almost all of that in some way.

“.....”

What should I do? I even heard my phone buzzing next to my pillow. For some reason, it felt like not answering would be the right choice. I can't explain it, but I had the feeling that if I answered that phone call, my blissful and calm holidays would shatter to pieces, like a pin being hit by a bowling ball to achieve a strike.

However, not answering is also dangerous. After all, we're talking about Suzutsuki Kanade. If I ignored her now, she might push some financial credit on my family that we won't ever be able to recover from. That's why—answering her phone call is the safe choice.

Thus, ten seconds passed. On heavy and demotivated feet, I returned to my room, and carefully picked up my phone, like I was about to defuse a bomb, and checked the screen. As expected, it said 'Devil Suzutsuki' there.

“...Alright.”

I took a deep breath, like I was doing some indoor yoga. I need to keep my calm, at least the bare minimum. I can't lose my cool no matter what she says. That iron will is what I need in order to keep a decent conversation with that woman. This isn't a story of a wolf and piglet, but I definitely can't let any enemy inside the house, or even near it.

**If you want a fight, bring it on.** This determination filled me, and I

pressed the accept button—

‘Heeeey, Jirou-kun...Why is my incoming call melody the theme of The Godfather?’

“How do you even know that!?” I completely threw out any polite language.

...I’m not good after all, am I. What’s that about keeping my calm? I completely lost that one second in...

‘For crying out loud, at least make it the Darth Vader theme instead. That would fit my image much better.’

“Ah, you think so as well? I was actually hesitating between those two, and...Wait, that’s not the problem here! Why do you know about my phone settings!?”

I never told anybody. Is she some kind of esper? If so, then maybe she can bend spoons, or fit into a boston bag?

‘I don’t possess such a convenient ability.’ She easily guessed what I was thinking, and answered my questions for me. ‘Using the surveillance cameras and wiretaps in your home, I can easily guess the melody you’re using for me.’

“What are you doing to my privacy!?”

‘It was a lot of trouble. After all, we set up at least 120 cameras, including inside the bath.’

“My ass you did!”

‘Jirou-kun, you always start washing yourself beneath your armpits, right.’

“You actually did, I can’t believe it!”

‘Also, you should probably search for a new place to hide your erotica, it’s inside a second layer in the second drawer of your learning desk, isn’t it.’

“Stop! Don’t reveal any more personal information than that!”

‘I’m sorry, I’ve actually already released it all up on Ni\*onico<sup>1</sup>.’

“You damn weeeeench!”

‘It’s fine, I properly put an age limit on there.’

“...Age limit?”

‘R-70. Only those above the age of 70 will be able to view these videos.’

“I should be thankful, and yet I feel oddly aggravated!?”

‘Only people who have experienced the sweetness and spice of life are allowed to have a look at these videos. Isn’t that perfectly representative of your daily life?’

“What kind of life do you think I’m living over here...”

I mean, she’s not technically wrong, I guess. But, streaming that online is not fair. What if someone is going to type some funny comment with the timestamp of that retort just now...

‘It’s fine, all of it is mere hogwash.’

“Eh?”

‘In reality, Kureha told me about all of that.’

“.....”

‘On a side note, she told me about all of that the second I offered to treat her to some Garigari-kun<sup>2</sup>, you know. I’d love to have such an honest little sister like you.’

Sure you would, you damn witch. We’re talking about a little sister who’d easily share information about her own family...for one piece of Garigari-kun.

‘Leaving that aside...’ Suzutsuki let out a sigh. ‘You really have some distinct interests, don’t you.’

“!”

‘I never knew boys liked that sort of stuff.’

“.....”

‘But, your future girlfriend might be disgusted, so be careful.’

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

How could this happen! A girl from my class found out about my fetishes! And she even gave me advice about it!

‘What’s wrong? It’s only me who knows, not that big of a deal.’

“Quiet! It’s embarrassing, so shut up!”

This is too cruel. Why did this have to happen during Golden Week? What did I do to deserve my classmate making fun of my interests? Damn it, it’s all her fault. You better ready yourself, Kureha. I’ll be looking through your room as well as soon as I get the chance, you hear me.

‘I would suggest against that. It’s a crime to search through a girl’s room. Even without having superpowers, I can see what would happen to you if you did that.’

What a coincidence, so can I. However, as a man, I can’t back down there. Also, can you stop reading my thoughts? Your intuition is way too on-point. You’re already enough of an esper, so leave me alone and work with the FBI.

“So, what do you want? Did you solely call me to give me advice on my fetishes?”

Aren’t you admirable? Why not take it a step further, and become a politician’s assistant. You might improve a lot of things in this country.

‘The thing is, a certain problem arose.’

“A problem?”

‘Yes, a small problem. What are you doing right now?’

“Eating cup ramen and sleeping.”

‘...Basically, you have time.’

Don’t say it so directly. I went through hell to get this small piece of free time.

‘So, about the problem...’

**Ding-dong**, the doorbell rang. It seems like a visitor has arrived.

“Sorry, Suzutsuki, I gotta hang up, someone’s at my place.”

I wanted to end this call anyway, so this was perfect timing. I don’t have any plans of having visitors today, but it’s probably some newspaper or religious canvassing. They sure are working hard even over Golden Week.

‘I see.’

There, she hung up. Hm? That was easier than I thought. Maybe it really wasn’t that big of a problem after all.

“...Also, calm down, will you?”

The visitor kept ringing the bell over and over and over and over. What is this, some door-to-door seller? Aren’t you passionate, you bastards.

“Yes yes, I’m coming.” I jogged towards the door, and unlocked it.

I’m only wearing half pants with a thin t-shirt, but since I’m at home, that shouldn’t be a problem, right. Only some random stranger will get to see me either way.

“.....Good morning, Jirou.”

However, when I opened the door, an unexpected individual greeted me.

“...Konoe?”



The first thing that entered my view was an exquisite and delicate physique, as well as facial features resembling an antique doll. She had her hair bound up behind her, possessing translucent eyes, and a calm alto voice. She's a handsome **boy**, known as 'Subaru-sama' at our school—Konoe Subaru.

And for some reason, she stood in front of my house on this very day. However...something was off. Specifically, the long pants, the vest, and the tailcoat—A butler uniform. Adding to this official uniform, she had a sports bag on her shoulder. I mean, she's a butler of the Suzutsuki Family, so it's fine I guess, but...why would she come to my place wearing these clothes? Not to mention during a holiday. She's not here to observe me, is she.

As I stood frozen in the doorway, Konoe looked all over the place, not saying a word as we stood facing each other. An awkward silence reigned—

“—Please let me stay over.”

The one to break this silence was Konoe herself.....Hold on? Did she really just say what I think she did? Something about letting her stay over? No, that can't be the case. Why would Konoe need to stay over at my place? I must have misheard, yeah. Rover? Is she going to buy a car with her salary or something?

“If...if you didn't hear me properly, then I'll say it again.” Konoe tried her best to keep a straight face, and looked at me. “S-Starting today... let me stay over at your place!”

“.....”

...Ouch. Some unfamiliar headache suddenly assaulted my brain, forcing me to crouch down while holding my head. Subaru-sama is standing in front of my eyes, but possibly out of embarrassment, her head was as red as a tomato. Not to mention that I could see tears build up in the corners of her eyes. What should I do about this?

As I was left bewildered on how to even respond to that, my phone rang again, with the theme of the Godfather—It was Suzutsuki. Ahh, thank god. I guess this is what they call a blessing in disguise. With

sweaty fingers, I took out my smartphone from my pocket, and pressed the button to accept the call, hope filling my chest.

‘—You heard her. Take care of Subaru, Jirou-kun.’

**Clank!** Because of this unexpected homerun, the inside of my head swiftly turned into the Koshien stadium<sup>3</sup> during mid-summer.

♀ × ♂

“Give me a break! Why is there any need for you Konoe to stay over at my place!?” After standing frozen for five seconds, I screamed back into my phone.

‘Why are you creating such a ruckus because of this? Subaru is a boy, so it’s fine, isn’t it.’

“...There’s a big problem there.”

‘Oh my, what would that be?’

“You...It’s because Konoe’s a girl!”

Trying to play dumb now...In fact, Konoe is wearing male clothing while attending our school, but she indeed is a girl. In order to be granted permission to work as Suzutsuki’s butler, she needs to spend her three years at school without anybody finding out that she is a girl, or some annoying pact along those lines.

She apparently managed to hide it fairly smoothly throughout the first year, but right after we both moved up to our second year, I happened to find out that secret of hers. Adding to that, Suzutsuki offered to help me cure my gynophobia if I kept Konoe’s secret, so that’s our current relationship. Put simply, we’re partners in crime.

‘Isn’t this a wonderful chance? If you live together with Subaru, you might be able to slowly cure your gynophobia, don’t you think?’

Urk, that’s Devil Suzutsuki for you. She’s using any kind of fitting excuse to make me shut up. I get where she’s coming from, but the hurdle you created is too high for me. Think about it. Now that Kureha is gone for her training camp, it’s only me at home.

‘On top of that, you must be lonely without your little sister around, aren’t you?’

“Huh? As if that’s—”

...No, hold on. Now that I think about it, why does she know that Kureha isn’t home right now?

‘It’s not such a surprise now, is it? I heard from Kureha-chan herself that she’ll be gone for a few days. We’re pretty close, remember?’

That’s right. Kureha even started calling Suzutsuki ‘Onee-sama’. At first, she was calling her like that because of the nonsense about me and Suzutsuki dating, but even now that the misunderstanding was resolved, they’re still like actual sisters. Why not put your name in the family register already?

“Also, why does Konoe need to stay over at my place anyway?”

It’s Golden Week, so why is staying at Suzutsuki’s residence not an option?

‘I told you, a problem arose.’ Suzutsuki continued with a calm tone. ‘Yesterday—Subaru was driven out of the residence.’

“Wha—”

What’s up with thaaaaaaaaaat!?

“What’s going on? Why was Konoe driven out just like that?”

I mean, wasn’t Konoe’s family working as the butlers of the Suzutsuki Family for the past few generations? She wouldn’t get chased out just because of any small reason, I bet.

‘Why? That’s obvious.’ Suzutsuki let out a sigh. ‘Because of the Lehman shock<sup>4</sup>.’

“Seriously!?”

‘We’re in an economic slump as of late, right? That’s why we thought of lessening the numbers of our servants.’

“That’s way too reasonable and absurd at the same time! You’d fire your own butler for that!?”

‘Fire? Heavens, no. I would call it restructuring.’

“That’s basically the same! Also, you’re definitely pulling my leg, aren’t you! Even I can tell now!”

If you were to create a pie chart about the human being called Konoe Subaru, then at least 80% of her existence revolves around being Suzutsuki Kanade’s butler. If she really was sacrificed for this restructuring, then I wouldn’t be surprised if she lost her will to live.

‘For now, let’s leave the details aside.’

“So you were just spitting nonsense.”

‘In reality, my father forces himself onto Subaru with his odd S&M tendencies night after night, so...’

“If you don’t take this seriously now, I’ll hang up for good.”

‘Fufu, no need to be so uptight, Jirou-kun, there’s just some circumstances.’

“Don’t try to cover it up with a laugh.”

‘...Well, long story short, Subaru has no place to stay.’

Urk...

‘That’s why, let her stay over, will you. There’s no real harm if she lives with you for a few days, right?’

Mm, that’s Devil Suzutsuki for you, she really knows how to push the conversation into the direction she wants. You make it sound like it’s no big deal, but it’ll still be the two of us. I’m a healthy boy in his adolescence, remember? They say that, after the age of 7, boys and girls should be kept apart.

‘No need to worry.’ As if she had seen right through me, she announced. ‘Even if it’s just the two of you, I know that some chicken

bastard like you would never dare do anything to Subaru.’

It felt like someone stabbed a sharp blade right into my chest. So you can say that with no restraint at all, you damn devil. That’s against the rules. You know, you’re crushing my pride as a man right there...

“No thank you...” I rejected Suzutsuki’s request once again.

I mean, I do feel bad towards Konoe, who stood in the corner of the entrance like a hamster at an awkward gathering, but my Golden Week finally starts today. I don’t think I’ll ever get that chance again, so I want to treasure my alone-time.

‘I see, it can’t be helped then. Jirou-kun, I’d like to talk with Subaru for a second, could you hand her the phone?’

It seemed like Suzutsuki gave up, as the tone of her voice dropped. Well, that should be fine, I guess. I did as I was told, and handed Konoe my phone.

‘Hello? Can you hear me, Subaru?’

“Yes, young lady...”

‘So you were listening. I guess plan A didn’t work out as intended.’

“.....” Konoe stayed quiet, like she felt awkward about something.

Also, what the hell is plan A?

‘If so—move on to plan B.’

**Twitch**, Konoe’s body faintly shook. Is it just my imagination, or does she look oddly pale?

“So...I really have to?”

‘Of course. If not, then carrying all that luggage would have been for naught.’

“...Understood.”

Konoe nodded, and closed the entrance door, stepping outside. I



heard some odd rustling sounds. What is happening at the front entrance of my home? I can't see it because it's at a dead angle from me...

"Oi, Suzutsuki."

'Yes, my dear Jirou-kun.'

"You're scheming something unholy again, aren't you."

'Quite the rude assumption, I must say. Did I ever do something that troubled you in any way?'

"...Um, there's way too many things, I'm having trouble deciding which ones to name here..."

I'm confident that if we took this to court, I'd definitely be the winner. If there is any gentleman out there who wants to act as the lawyer against this woman, name yourself. I'll pay you a full 500 yen even.

'It's fine, you'll understand what plan B is about right away—You and your body, that is.' Suzutsuki explained herself with quite the eerie choice of words.

I guess she's planning to force things her way as always. Not to mention that her words hold more credibility than anything I see written on Instagram. I need to think of countermeasures immediately. A sense of danger crept up my back, when I heard the door opening—

"—!"

The moment I saw what was behind it, I almost choked. Cat ears. There were cat ears. Subaru-sama was wearing cat ears fitting her hair color, together with an adorable cat tail hanging down her behind.

"....."

Damn it, there's way too many things to retort on, I'm confused if I even should. All I knew for certain is that Konoe definitely wasn't

onboard with this plan. She stayed silent, full of embarrassment, as her cheeks were beet red. But, how do I say this, that was oddly exciting as well...and not bad. Not to forget the butler uniform she was wearing, this black and white contrast really hit home, as well as the irregularity in the regular.

A butler...A cat-eared butler...How could this happen. Despite it being unbalanced like nothing I had ever seen, it was so destructive all the same...

‘Come on, Subaru. Do as we practiced.’

From across the phone, I heard the order of the young lady, sounding like some personal trainer. The cat-eared butler looked close to breaking out in tears, with crimson-colored cheeks, and yet she tried her hardest to move those soft lips of hers—

“D-Dear master, if you let me stay over...I’ll do whatever you want from meow~”

“—!”

...Oh lord help me. This might actually break all view records on Ni\*onico...! On top of muttering those words in sheer embarrassment, she even took the pose of a cat. As if to respond to this movement, her cat ears and tail jolted up and down. This...I’ve never seen this before. The always strong and cool Subaru-sama was forced into some embarrassing roleplay...!

“...Ah, wait!”

Right before crossing a dangerous line, I managed to regain my rational thinking. That was too close, I was about to be entranced by the enemy. For a second, I thought to myself ‘Well, it wouldn’t hurt to keep one at home, right?’.

‘How surprising. To think plan B didn’t bring you down...’ I heard Suzutsuki clicking her tongue across the phone.

Suzutsuki Kanade is a dangerous woman. To think she would resort to such measures. If she had even cat paws, I’d probably have been killed in action. Konoe could probably reign the world looking like

this. But...something is off. Why is Suzutsuki making Konoe do this, without even being around? Normally, she'd be enjoying these things in the prime row, first class, with popcorn in hand.

'Why did things end up this way, I wonder? After how hard we practiced...Those 150 times of rehearsal were all for nothing? We even had a video cameraman help us...'

There, Devil Suzutsuki spilled the beans. She actually blasted out so much money...Damn it, I'm so jealous. Just send me a DVD recording later. For a moment, I was seriously considering using up my entire New Year's money just for that.

**Gruuuuuuuuuuuuumb~**

There, I heard an odd and almost unreal sound.

"...Was that..."

Maybe the sound of a stomach? But, whose? Definitely not mine, and it couldn't be Suzutsuki's, as I was talking with her over the phone. That would mean...

"W-Waaaaah! You're wrong! That wasn't me, okay!" Konoe the cat-eared butler flapped her arms roundabout, trying to frantically prove her innocence.

...So obvious. No need to interrogate her, she's guilty as charged.

"W-What's that look for! You aren't doubting me, are you?"

"I mean, I definitely heard that sound just now."

"No idea what you're talking about." Konoe did her best to not look me in the eyes, trying her best to whistle her innocence.

Sheesh, she sucks at lying.

"Why not spit it out? It'll make things easier for you."

"Who's saying that? A butler's mouth isn't that easy to crack."

“I’ll make some katsudon for you if you answer me honestly.”

“Are you making fun of me!?”

“Ah, Konoe...There’s drool coming out of your mouth.”

“Wha...” In shock, Konoe touched her mouth.

Of course, there was never any drool to begin with, I was merely testing her.

“Y-You deceived me...” Konoe complained like a sulking child after falling for my trap, and glared at me. “Damn it...!”

However, there was no usual pressure to be found. Naturally, you could say. After all, she’s a cat-eared butler right now. No fragment of pressure from her. All I figured out—is that this dear butler is hungry, and quite the glutton.

Despite possessing such a small stature, Konoe can eat a lot. The other 20% of her pie chart is probably ‘Hamburger~’ or ‘Omurice~’ and other delicious foods just written on there. Or she might have taken a bite from the pie chart as a whole. Not to mention that she must be lacking energy because of being hungry.

“Hm?”

There, a thought popped up in my mind. Just now, Suzutsuki said that Subaru was thrown out of the house yesterday. However, she only came to my place this morning. That brings up the question—where as she stayed in between those two points in time?

“Don’t tell me, were you spending the night beneath the playground equipment in the public park?”

I was desperately hoping to be off the mark here, but Konoe’s eyes opened wide in shock, like she had been caught mid-crime. Are you serious? For a second, I envisioned the Subaru-sama curling up beneath cardboard at the playground...No, I can’t, it’s way too surreal. What if some fan happened to witness that scene? They’d probably have to get an appointment at a psychiatric hospital.

“Did you...not eat anything since yesterday?”

“W-Well, something like that.”

“But, there’s the convenience store, right? You could have gotten something from there.”

“...I dropped it.” She hesitated. “When I was kicked out of the residence, I lost my wallet right after. So, I didn’t have anything...”

“.....”

So she’s been walking around without money.

‘With this, you should understand it, right. The reason she came to your home is because I desperately convinced her. I can’t tell you the reason, but she definitely has no plans of coming home just yet.’

“No plans of coming home?”

What’s that about? I get that she was thrown out, but she doesn’t plan on coming home? That almost sounds like she doesn’t want to go back to the Suzutsuki Family.

‘Not to mention that there’s some rather unpleasant cold going around. Some people in our class already caught it, so if she stays outside tonight as well, she’ll definitely catch a cold herself.’

“...!”

‘Say, Jirou-kun, you’re Subaru’s friend, right? Don’t friends help each other when they’re in trouble?’ Suzutsuku spoke that far, and grew silent.

...I can’t. How could I reject her now. It still doesn’t sit completely right with me that she won’t tell me the real reason this happened, but that doesn’t mean I can just ignore her like this. Even if she’s wearing a butler’s uniform, she still is a girl. Ahh...farewell, my Golden Week. I hope we can see each other again next year.

“Alright—come on in.” I looked at Konoe. “But, don’t expect too much. Right now, I only have apples and cup ramen with me, and

although it might be better than sleeping outside, my home is much smaller, and dirtier, than Suzutsuki's place."

Luckily, Mom's room is open. It's been half a year since we really cleaned that, but with a bit of effort, it should be inhabitable at least.

"...Yeah. Sorry about this, Jirou." She must have felt relief, as her cheeks relaxed a bit.

I really would have loved to hear about the reason she was chased out, but I'll keep that for later. She doesn't seem like she wants to talk about it, and I don't enjoy invading other people's privacy. Unlike a certain rich lady out there.

"But—don't worry." However, Konoe suddenly puffed out her chest, proudly declaring. "I won't expect you to let me stay for free."

"...? What's up with that? You dropped your wallet, didn't you?"

"Yep. That's why I'll pay with my body."

"...Body?"

Hearing my question, Konoe seemed to have caught on to her blunder.

"Why are you emphasizing that part!"

"I mean, you said..."

"Y-You're wrong! That's not what...Ehm...I-I didn't mean it in any lewd way..." She put one hand on her chest, taking a deep breath. "I said that I'll be servicing you with this body."

"...Wha?"

"You still don't understand it? Then let me be straight. For the time that I'm staying over at your place, I will be—your butler. That is the least I can do after all."

"....."

“That being the case—Please treat me well, dear master.” The cat-eared butler showed a polite bow.

‘My, it seems like this will be quite the interesting Golden Week’, I heard some ominous declaration from my phone, but the shock wouldn’t allow me to think straight anymore.

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1 Niconico, a Japanese video-sharing service

2 A Japanese popsicle brand character, which looks absolutely terrifying

3 Stadium where the finale for the all-Japan high school baseball tournament finale is played

4 This [article](#) can explain it far better than I ever could. TL;DR: Global financial crisis caused by the collapse of the Lehman brothers investment bank





# Chapter 2: Don't call me Master!

“Jirou.....Is this okay?” Konoe came down from the stairs leading to the second floor, and called out to me.

Compared to before, she wasn't wearing her butler uniform, but rather a girl's uniform from our Rouran Academy. On top of that, she wore a cute apron with a cat imprinted on it.



“But, are you sure about me borrowing this?”

“No worries, no worries. Kureha also looked through my stuff before, so she doesn’t have any room to complain about that. I was a bit worried about the size being too small, but I guess it worked out.”

Everything Konoe wore, including the apron, belonged to Kureha. Wearing a butler’s uniform in a commoner’s house like this would be

too far off, so I had her take a shower and change her clothes. I recommended some clothes that would allow for easy moving, but apparently she preferred a girl's uniform instead. Since she always wears a male uniform, she must be interested in this sort of thing.

Her skirt and apron fluttered as she moved. Clothes-wise, she looked more like a high school girl making breakfast rather than a butler, but that isn't half bad either. Well, how do I say this...it doesn't hurt once in a while. Also, I somehow managed to convince her and drop the whole 'dear master' stuff. Being called that way by a girl would just leave me restless. Not to mention that it feels like I'm committing a crime if I do that at home.

"However, entering a girl's room without permission..."

"Don't sweat it. Also, you're a girl in the end, so no problem."

If she was an actual boy, that would have been a bigger problem. However, she's a girl, so it should be fine. It's way less embarrassing with it's someone from the same sex after all. If I did that, I'd get put on a stake.

"R-Right. I am...a girl after all."

Hm? I feel like that was an obvious statement on my end, but Konoe seemed a bit mindful. Maybe she's embarrassed to wear someone else's clothes.

"More importantly, let's eat some cup ramen. You must be hungry, right." I beckoned Konoe over to the living room.

Since our home is as average as it could be, the living room isn't anything to boast about. Even the TV is an average CRT. Not to mention that it still is running on analogue broadcast. On the walls, we have family pictures, which are a bit embarrassing. They show me and Kureha when we were still small children, as well as my Mom and my old man when he was still alive.

"Your family seems nice, Jirou. You look so close." Konoe muttered, as she looked at the pictures.

Oh yeah, she's not on the greatest terms with her old man—Konoe

Nagare. I definitely won't forget. That old fart literally beat me to a pulp last month. In my memories, he was... an absolute helicopter parent. Konoe might act and look like a boy, but she still is an adolescent girl, so there must be some tough times for both sides.

After we looked through the pictures, we sat down at the living room table. On top of said table, we had cups of ramen filled with boiling water. Around two and a half minutes passed, this should be about done.

"...Apologies, if only I could have cooked something..." Konoe looked at the instant food in front of her, and showed a dejected attitude.

Ah crap, I didn't think about that. Konoe has a reason why she can't cook anything—Her fear of knives. Put simply, just by seeing anything that resembles a blade, she basically gets close to fainting. But, something is weird. From what I heard, shouldn't she have conquered some of that fear?

"I mean, I've been starting to get used to touching knives, but it's too hard for me to deal with when it comes to cooking."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Before, I ruined a microwave..."

"....."

Um, what exactly does that have to do with your fear of knives?

"Before that, I ruined a toaster..."

"W-Well, don't worry about it too much. Most stuff we have here right now are apples anyway, so you could have made it with that. Let's just get to eating."

Some things are better left alone after all, so I split up my chopsticks. Opening the lid, a pleasant scent was carried to my nose, together with some white steam. Hmm, perfect. That's cup ramen for you, I don't know any better invention Japan has offered to the world. I admired the scenery in front of me, and poured seasoning oil on the

mass inside the cup.

“Hmmm...”

Konoe looked at the cup of ramen like she was inspecting a time bomb. If I had to compare it, she resembled a stray cat being given food she had never seen before. Is this...her first time eating cup ramen?

“You just put the stuff of the bag inside. No need to be so wary about it. There’s no poison inside.”

To prove my words, I took a sip myself, to which Konoe added own seasoning, and carried the ramen to her mouth.

“!”

For a moment, her eyes opened wide, only for them to sparkle, as she carried more of the food to her mouth. Ohh, it seems like she’s taken a liking to it. That’s a Super \*up for you, even pleasing the tongue of a butler. Still, this being her first cup? That’s a harsh culture shock, alright.

“Jirou, more.”

“Wah, so fast!”

The cup’s empty already!? Not even any soup’s left! I barely had one mouthful!

“Hmpf, not half bad.” Konoe said, nodding in a satisfied fashion.

She must have really taken a liking to it, as she ate the cup three times faster than me.

“Jirou.” While I prepared another share, Konoe suddenly spoke up with a serious expression. “I think it’s time that I went to greet your parents.”

**Pffffffffft!** I spit out the chicken and soup I had in my mouth.

“Why are you so shocked? Although it’ll only be for a short while, I

will act as your butler here. As you are my master, I need to greet your parents. Isn't that common sense?" Butler-kun said it like it was part of the truth of this world.

Don't phrase it so weirdly, will you. Throwing in a retort inside my head, I still coughed violently.

"You don't have to do that. Mom's on a trip overseas right now, and my old man is..."

"Your father is?"

"....." Albeit subconsciously, the words got stuck in my throat.

That reminds me, Konoe only has one parent left. And, she's lost hers at around the same time, for roughly the same reason. I lost my father, she lost her mother. I feel like I dropped a hint that my old man died back at the leisure land, but she just saw it as a joke back then, right...Mm, what to do.

"...My old man transferred away because of his job, which is why he won't be home for a while." In the end, I blurted out a lie.

I didn't want Konoe to be overly considerate of me because I don't have a father, and neither did I want to remind her of her mother either. Well, I might not be on the level of Suzutsuki, but a bit of a white lie wouldn't hurt. She shouldn't be able to figure it out that soon, so this is fine.

"I see. Then it can't be helped. By the way, what about Kureha-chan? I haven't seen her at all."

Konoe apparently believed my lie, and changed the topic fairly swiftly. Right as I sighed in relief, another doubt popped up in my head. Shouldn't she know that Kureha is out on that training camp? Maybe Suzutsuki just didn't tell her yet?

"She's out camping for 3 days 2 nights, that's why she'll be back home the day after tomorrow."

When I gave the news, Konoe returned a baffled 'Eh?' with a frozen expression.

“...Hey, Jirou?”

“Hm?”

“D-Does this mean that...until Kureha-chan comes back...It'll be **just the two of us living here?**”

...! Crap, I totally forgot about that.

“What is this about! I hadn't heard about this!”

“I mean, I assumed you knew since Suzutsuki did...”

“I didn't hear anything regarding that!” Her cheeks turned red, as she slammed both her hands on the desk.

Ahhhhh, I messed up. Right as we somehow calmed down, another tragedy occurred. I should have guessed that Suzutsuki didn't tell Konoe about that part...This is bad. I need to think of a way to clear the air.

“A-Anyway, let's keep that for later. After you're done eating, just put the tableware over there. I'll go head to sleep once I'm done.”

I basically said that I needed to run away from there as quickly as possible. However, after hearing my words, Konoe shot up from her chair.

“S-Sleep!? Hold on! I mean, right now, I am the butler of this house... basically, your butler, but this suddenly...you're asking for lewd demands...!?”

“!”

Ahhhhh! I dug my own grave!

“Y-You're wrong! I didn't mean it that way! I'm just going to take a nap, so you can relax around the house. Mom's room up on the second floor is open as well...”

The inside of my chest was comparable to the Titanic, panicking as we were about to sink. Even so, I tried my best to keep calm, and eat

the last of my ramen...

“...Take a nap? What do you mean by that?” Konoe tilted her head, like a squirrel holding a chestnut.

I mean, can there be multiple meanings or something?

“That I’m going to get some sleep.”

“Sleep...It’s already past 9 in the morning, you know?” Konoe answered, after taking a glance at the clock.

Her eyes looked like she had just heard something unbelievable, doubting her ears. It’s like she’s spotted a red panda in the wild.

“Is that something to be shocked about? It might be a bit late to head to sleep again, but there’s bound to be high school students who do that, right?”

Before exams, there’s a lot of people who pull all-nighters, so getting an extra share of sleep isn’t anything odd. We’re talking about current high school students as well. However...

“—The young lady doesn’t do anything like that.” Butler-kun announced. “No matter how late she goes to bed, she always wakes up at 6am. That is a proper and healthy lifestyle.”

“Even if you say that...I’m sleepy, so let me sleep.”

Why do you have to judge my way of living like that? Are you my mother or something. I stood up, and was about to head to my room, when—

“Slacker.”

I heard these words whispered behind my back. Turning around, I was greeted by a displeased Subaru-sama. Adding to that, she was pouting, and glaring at me.

“Alright, I get it. I fully grasped what kind of life you’re living here, Jirou. I will beat that messed up nature of yours into shape. It’s a butler’s duty to uphold their master’s righteous lifestyle.”



“Beat into shape...”

What are you, some blacksmith? Are you announcing your plans for the day? This isn't a summer break for grade school students, you can't fix a depraved high school student's life this easily.

“There's a dojo beneath your home, right? Let's do some practice there.”

“Practice...”

Ahh, how nostalgic. I was forced through that every day when Mom was still living here.

“...Huh, alright then. I could use some practice.” I announced, as I cracked my neck.

Change of plans, I've decided. Honestly speaking, I seriously hate pain, but after not experiencing Mom's sparta education for half a year—I can feel my body growing dull. That's right, just look at the incident at the leisure land last month.

Stand By Me. These words I won't ever be able to forget. That's why, training my body some more surely wouldn't hurt.

“...”

However, I at least have to make sure I'm not getting injured. As I swore this inside my heart, I left the living room, and headed down to the dojo. That's right, at that time, I still had a bit of leisure left. I can't have Konoe get injured.

However, it only took half a day for me to realize how native I was in thinking I could be this relaxed.

♀ × ♂

“Urk...Haaa...”

The underground dojo pretty much is a single room that doesn't quite fit right with an average family's home. The first thing that probably would catch your attention is the practicing ring in the center of it.

There's other sandbags and muscle training equipment to find, filling this place with the size of about 33 square meters. Truthfully, this is all part of Mom's hobby.

I collapsed in the center of the ring, forming the shape of a 大. A few hours passed, and with a few breaks between practice, it was pretty much a one-sided battle.

"I think we should call it a day." An alto voice reached my ears.

When I raised my gaze, I spotted Subaru-sama, keeping a fresh face, wearing a karate uniform. It's the white type you'd see in judo or karate, with a black hakama below. She couldn't exactly fight with an apron on, so I lent her some clothes we had around. Of course, I had some others at my disposal, but she chose this on purpose. When she put it on, she looked pretty dignified, and it actually fit her, but that wasn't the limit of it.

—She's too strong. Thinking about it, she even easily won against Kureha at the game center last month. That's why I should have expected this result. I'm constantly on the receiving end. This is the first time I've experienced this. In a game with many hits, I would judge that I have no chance, and wait for my chance for a pinning technique, but she got ahead of me.

Konoe Subaru—I heard that she learned in self-defence in order to protect her master, but...to think we had such a difference between us. Damn it, I had confidence in my stamina. But, to think that a girl would beat me like this...

"You don't need to be so dejected. Your sparring wasn't half bad today." Konoe offered me a towel and a water bottle as I stared up at the ceiling.

I feel like most of that was just charity, but you can't solve a problem without a sacrifice. I poured the cold water down my throat, and wiped the sweat off my head. Looking over at the time, it was getting close to evening.

I actually didn't plan to go that far, but since I was constantly on the receiving end, my desire to at least get one win burned up inside of

me. However, after half a year, my body really grew dull after all. I might have to get back to training for real.

But, leaving that aside—thanks to us sparring like this, I feel like I've gotten used to touching and being touched by a girl some more. I mean, it's not that big of a deal, but just as Suzutsuki said, living together with Konoe might help fix my gynophobia.

"Still, you have a lot of these clothes here, huh. With different sizes for each. Is your mother a collector?"

What kind of collector is that supposed to be? Nobody has such an odd fetish.

"You're wrong. These are spoils of war."

"Spoils of war?"

"When I was still young, Mom took me to all sorts of martial arts dojos, like wrestling, judo, karate, and so on. It went with the 'If I win, you give me your uniform' style."

I was losing a lot, but the same couldn't be said for Kureha. She absolutely destroyed those other guys, even adult instructors stood no chance. I felt nostalgic as I explained all of that, but Konoe just gave me a dubious gaze.

"Hey...didn't she go around crushing other dojos then?"

"Hm? I guess so. They called it a raid whenever we came by."

"That's even worse!"

"Around here, we were known as the 'Raid Siblings', you know."

"Why do you sound proud about that!?"

"Well, it was just us brats playing around. Mom promised us to get hamburgers and all that, so it was pretty fun."

Thinking back on it, a lot happened. The reason I got friendly with Kurose is because I went to his judo club. When Kureha, in grade

school at the time, completely destroyed even those middle school students who were on national level, both me and him grew pale.

“—Jirou, did you finish wiping off your sweat?” As I was desperately trying to suppress my past traumas, Konoe called out to me.

“Oh, right. Want to take a shower first? I can wait.”

“No, I’d like to take care of the laundry before that. I see that you’ve amassed a fair amount.” She said, while accepting the towel drenched with my sweat.

I offered to help out, but she flatly declined.

“You don’t need to do anything. This is the job of a butler.”

Or so she says, but I just feel bad now. I bet Konoe must be tired herself. Should I really just be lounging around?

“Don’t worry about it, just go take some rest.”

Konoe must have figured out what I was thinking, as she only left these words behind, picked up the undergarments, and took up the ladder outside the dojo.

“...?”

Weird. I don’t know if she’s doing it on purpose, but she seems oddly cold, and blunt. Mmm, weird. Even though she was so lively when we were sparring. Maybe that second cup of ramen was hard on her stomach? Hmm...

“...Ah.”

I forgot to tell her, but the washing machine isn’t exactly working according to the manual right now. Specifically speaking, if you put in more than the recommended amount, the machine will shake around like some Dempsey roll straight out of a boxing manga<sup>1</sup>, and completely stop working. When it showed some problems before, Kureha tried to fix it with a beautiful Shining Wizard move, which messed it up even more, and the washing machine’s been in its rebellious age since.

“Can’t help it, I’ll go check on her.” I climbed up the ladder.

Since she’s going to take care of the laundry, I might as well add my own clothes I’m wearing right now, it’d be a lot more efficient, right? She might mix up the colors as well if she’s not careful.

“...Hm?”

I walked down the hallway towards the changing room, about to open the door—which was opened a small bit. This opening showed me an odd scenery. I mean, I wasn’t trying to peek or anything. The scene that popped up in my view was just so odd, I couldn’t help but stop my hand from fully opening the door.

...Seriously, what is she doing? She stood in front of the washing machine, frozen stiff with my towel in hand. Looking at the laundry basket, the laundry must be inside the machine. So, why is she not putting in the bath towel?

“.....” She just silently looked at the towel in her hand.

But...something’s off. It’s almost like she’s desperately trying to hold herself back. If I were to give an example, it felt like there was a small devil and angel sitting on her shoulder, fighting over whose opinion is right or wrong. Her expression was constantly going back and forth between interest and disgust.

“...”

Finally, like the battle had finished, she slowly, albeit hesitant, approached the towel with her face...

“—What are you doing?”

Unable to keep watching, I opened the door, intervening whatever was about to happen. There, Konoe’s face shot towards me, like she had seen a ghost.

“Hyaaaaa!” She raised a cute shriek, jumping up a solid 30cm.

Not to mention that she didn’t even angle her knees for that.

“Bwaoh!?”

Right after, a bottle of laundry detergent flew towards my face. I screamed in terror and pain, and writhed on the floor in agony. The person who slammed this bottle into my face glared at me like a lion that had its tail stepped on.

“Y-You saw, right! You’re wrong, okay! This isn’t what you think it is, Jirou! I-I definitely wasn’t sniffing a man’s scent! I-I wasn’t interested at all!”

Alright, calm down now. You’re blabbering too much I can’t follow at all. I pressed down my nose to deal with the pain, as Konoe started panicking while blushing aggressively.

“A-Anyway, don’t get the wrong idea! I didn’t do anything!”

“What’s wrong, anyway? Also, enough with the laundry, could you just leave the changing room? I want to take a bath.”

I was planning on lending her the bath first, but my hair is full of the detergent I was just thrown at, so after setting the timer for the washing machine, I had it start. I opened up the glass door leading to the shower room, where I immediately spotted shampoo and other beauty products that looked quite expensive. Naturally, they all belonged to Kureha. Just like a young girl would, she’s properly taking care of her hair.

By the way, when I used some of that before, she exchanged the contents of my fe\*reeze inside my room to dark soy sauce. Adolescent girls really are hard to deal with.

I started washing off the detergent from my entire body, and then my head. Of course, I was using my own shampoo. Next, I moved to my body, and once that was done, I rested my body in the bathtub full of hot water with some bubbles.

“...Phew.” A long sigh escaped my lips.

It feels like I’m back to life. All the exhaustion filling my body was slowly leaving. At this rate, my brain might just melt. I stretched my body and gazed at the ceiling, when—

“How’s the temperature?”

A sudden voice shocked me. Beyond the glass door stood Konoe. She must have come here to continue working on the laundry.

“It’s pretty nice, yeah.”

“I see, glad to hear that...Then, I’m coming in, okay?”

“Yeah, go ahead...”

...No, hold on. Did she just say something tremendous without a moment’s breath between?—is what I was in the middle of thinking, but it was already too late. Konoe Subaru was only equipped with a single bath towel, as she stepped into the shower room.

“Heyyyyyyyyyy!?! Y-You, what are you doing!?”

Gyaaaaaaa what is going on here?! I know this kind of scene is pretty much a template when it comes to romcoms, but to think I’d experience this myself!

“What...? It’s the duty of a butler to wash their master’s back...” She averted her gaze from me, and muttered with a faint voice.

What kind of duty is this? If you did that, I’d die of blood loss because of my phobia, remember? Also...does that mean that Suzutsuki and Konoe always take baths together? They’re smiling and laughing while watching each other’s backs...Ahh, the image...

“.....”

Crap. That’s seriously bad. The Heart Sutra<sup>2</sup> was already on endless repeat in my head. If I thought about anything unholy in this situation, I probably won’t be able to leave alive. Being found out right away truly is the greatest weakness of an adolescent boy.

“Y-You really don’t need to! I can wash my own back!”

Imagine Konoe calling me ‘Master’ here, it’d change this calm and peaceful bathing atmosphere to some indecent and perverted roleplay in a matter of seconds. What a tragic before and after that would be.

“N-No, my pride as a butler forces me to...”

Throw that out into the garbage disposal, I do not care. I could only focus on that white skin of hers, together with her voluptuous thighs peeking out from behind the towel. Her cheeks were crimson red from the embarrassment. Urk, I can't believe she'd look so lewd. I know I shouldn't be looking, but my eyes just naturally drift towards that area...!

“D-Don't stare like that...”

Konoe seemed a bit restless, as she pulled her towel downwards, fidgeting nervously. Stop, that gesture makes you look even more lewd than normal. At this rate, something very dangerous will happen with my lower body...!

“No need to worry, you might not be wearing anything, but by using this, that can be resolved!”

Or so she said, only for her to take out a blindfold from her towel. Youuuuuuuuuuuu idiot! Now you're definitely taking it too far. You're putting on a blindfold as you're together with a naked boy? What kind of roleplay is this? This has the strong stench of a crime tickling my nose.

“N-Now, Jirou. Sit down over there.” While wearing the blindfold, Konoe pointed at the chair inside the shower room.

“...!”

I guess...there's no room for me to escape. I made up my mind, and stood up from the bathtub, which created a splashing water sound. I know that she's blindfolded, but that doesn't make it any less miserable. As my heart was racing loudly, I turned my back towards Konoe, and sat down. Dang, my head's about to go crazy. I feel like I'm forced to sit down on an electric chair, preparing for my execution.

“Alright, then next will be the sponge and body soap...” Konoe's voice tickled my ears.

It seems like she's kneeling down on the floor.



“You okay? Maybe you should take off the blindfold after all...Wait, Konoe! Not that one! That’s clearly a metal brush and Mr. C\*ean!”

“Hmpf, so noisy. I know as much. It’s this one over here...”

“No, that’s a rubber ducky—”

“You fell for my prank! I actually meant to pick this. Don’t you worry, I know what I’m doing.”

“Ah...N-No! This one’s the worst! If you grab that, then something terrible will happen!”

Namely, at my lower half. After a bit of back and forth, Konoe finally managed to grab what she originally aimed for. Those were probably the worst few minutes of my entire life, riddled with absolute anxiety.

“T-Then, I’ll start, alright?”

“Y-Yeah, please do.”

We exchanged a few uncertain words, when I felt the sponge rub against my back, covered with the slimy sensation of body soap. With awkward movement, of course. She seems to be just as nervous as I was. She gently touched my back like she was cleaning an expensive car. Thanks to that, my heart was getting close to exploding.

“S-Still, Jirou, you sure have a large back.”

“W-Well, I’ve been trained ever since I was a young brat.”

The conversation was stiff enough I could hear metal clattering. Not to mention that the entire situation of being touched by a girl, barely wearing a bath towel, was already plenty dangerous. I could feel blood gathering at a single point inside my body—That’s right, my phobia was getting close to activating.

“K-Konoe, you don’t have to be this thorough, okay.”

When she reached my nape, I couldn’t stay silent any longer. Despite her movement being very awkward, she put a lot of strength into her

hands, which made it even more stimulating. Shivers were sent down my skin.

“...I-It’s okay. I pretty much finished your back already.” Konoe said, and reached for the shower head at the wall.

She must be planning to rinse off my back first. Speaking in pure process, I feel like she’d be better off doing that at the very end, but she must be in a state of confusion. Since she couldn’t see anything, I adjusted the heat of the water. Thanks to that, I could avoid the cliché of being showered by boiling hot water. But, it happened right as I relaxed.

“Hyah!” I heard an adorable shriek behind my back.

Following that, cold water splattered against me. It seems like being blindfolded really was a big problem after all. Apparently she meant to rinse off my back, but instead sprayed the water on her own head. Not to mention that the water heat was still the same as before. However, that’s not even where the problem ended. What really ruined it all was the fact that I **turned around because of the scream**.

“...!”

The scenery greeting me was too much, it forced me to swallow my breath. Konoe must have been surprised because of the cold water, because she lost her balance, and fell backwards on her behind. At the same time, because of the water, her towel was practically glued to her body, emphasizing her bodyline.

What first caught my attention was her slender skin and bright hair. Everything about this emphasized her adolescent but still growing body—

“.....”

Not good. I’m about to get a nosebleed for a different reason than my phobia.

“S-Stop, you pervert! Don’t look over here!”

She must have felt my gaze, because Konoe waved her hands as she was seated on the floor. But, that only had the opposite effect, as that led to her bath towel moving more and more from its intended location—

“Wah, you idiot, stop moving...!”

Reflexively, I grabbed Konoe’s arms to stop her wild movement.

“Ah...no...”

She probably was surprised to be restrained like that, because all the energy in her voice left, only a faint meep coming out of her mouth.

“...Jirou?”

Growing worried because I didn’t say a word, Konoe called out my name. **Ba-dump**, I felt my heart skip a beat. The bath towel moved for good, showing her delicate body, with rosy skin. I felt her softness when we touched. Konoe Subaru, revealing her everything—

“...J-Jirou...D-Don’t just keep quiet, and say something...” She sounded like a kitten pleading to her mother.

...Damn it, I’m going to lose all the reason I had left inside of me. Despite not even sitting in the hot bathtub anymore, my head feels like it’s on fire, limiting my thoughts. Can’t even tell if that’s because of my gynophobia or something else.



But, even so...the only thing I can guarantee is that nobody but us two are present right now. With this thought process, I took a deep breath. That's right, what if some of Konoe's fans were to see this. They'd skip the trial and directly deport me to the nearest gas chamber. Thinking about it that way, this situation is no problem at all.

Adding to that, Kureha isn't here. I'm so glad she's away for her

training camp. We're talking about that pro-wrestler, so if she found out that I was doing such a thing with a girl in our bath, she'd probably kill me for rea—

“I'm hooooome! Nii-san, you missed meeeee!?”

There, a voice that should not be here reached my ears. Following that, I heard a faint ‘Hmm? Where's Nii-san?’, together with footsteps walking down the hallway. To me, they sounded like footsteps of death approaching...This is the worst. At the worst imaginable timing, Sakamachi Kureha came home. What kind of awful secret stage is this...!

“J-Jirou! What is this about! Wasn't Kureha-chan supposed to come back the day after tomorrow...!”

I subconsciously pulled my hands away from Konoe's shaking body, to which she tried reaching for her blindfold.

“Waaaah! Stop! Don't take it off yet!”

At a moment's decision, I jumped into the bathtub. I finally was allowed to take a breath of relief, but the real problem wasn't resolved at all. I reconfirmed the situation. There was a young girl sitting on the floor, barely covered by a towel, and the butt-naked me who sat in the bathtub.

...Yeah, there's no way for me to get out of this alive. At this rate, this bath will turn into an execution site...!

“...Ahh, you were taking a bath?”

Eeek! She's already here. Damn it, What was that about this morning? I thought you went to the end of the universe! Well, now that it's come to this, I can only try to talk my way out of this battlefield...!

“Y-Yo, Kureha. What's up, you're back pretty early, huh? Weren't you supposed to be off at that training camp?” I tried to keep my voice as calm as possible, and called out the person through the glass door.

“Yeap, so were the plans, but there was a forced repatriation.”

“Forced repatriation?”

What’s that about? Did she plan to leave exile?

“The thing is...I broke my arm.”

“Wha?”

“As I said, I broke my arm. Been a while since I was taken to the hospital with the ambulance. When I showed it to the doctor, they said it’d take two weeks to heal.”

“.....”

My head hurt. What is she doing? She retired because of an injury?

“You okay? You’re not hurt besides that, right?”

“Yup, got out of it by sacrificing an arm. Pretty lucky, if I dare say so myself.”

“Lucky...”

“After all, I was dealing with an enemy weighing a solid 1000kg.”

“What were you fighting!?”

“Um...An Asian black bear?”

“You were actually fighting a bear!?”

Are you Kintarou or something? Why can I see her having a sumo bout with a bear.

“I apparently waltzed into its turf right as we arrived at the lodging. He sure was strong. I didn’t expect to suffer such a loss against it.”

“What kind of monster bear was that?”

“But, I won.”

“You actually did!?”

“That Asian black bear ran away like the coward he is!”

“Isn’t this called animal abuse...”

“Don’t blame me, the residents over there said ‘Ehehehe, young lady, if you chase away that bear, I’ll give you pudding’, you know.”

“I feel like that old man had some ulterior motives!”

“I was still more of the docile type in that scenario. The vice captain just screamed ‘Mountain hunting!’ and ran into the forest, ending up lost.”

“.....”

“They sent out a rescue troop, but since it’s that person, they’ll probably ruin the entire ecosystem. No worries that they’ll be making it home safely. Though, it kinda sucks that I had to retire on the first day.” Kureha seemed to be sulking towards the end.

Yet again, I realized that Rouran Academy’s handicrafts club definitely ain’t normal. From the way she tells her stories, they sound more like mercenaries sent outside the country for their missions.

“By the way, Nii-san.” My little sister spoke up, as calm as you could be. “Why are you taking a bath this early?”

“!”

There it is. Lord help me. The questioning time I had feared now finally arrived.

“T-There’s no particular reason, I was just feeling a bit sweaty.”

I wasn’t lying. Even now, my cold sweat would not stop coming out of every pore of my body.

“Huh...So, what about this karate uniform over here, beautifully folded together?”

“!?”

Crap! That must have been the one Konoe was wearing! How could this happen...She found solid proof not even a minute after the interrogation began...!

“W-Well, I just felt the urge to wear that, you know...”

“Even though the size doesn’t fit you?”

“Y-Yeah. It was a bit tight, but nothing too hard to squeeze into.”

“...Hmmm...So then...” She paused for a moment. “Mind telling me...why there’s folded womens’ underwear right next to it?”

“—!”

It’s over. Even my brain cells who worked exceptionally hard to come up with these excuses threw the papers with a ‘It’s over boss’, and started jumping off the nearby cliffs to end it all.

“I hope I’m wrong, but did you feel the sudden urge to try on women’s underwear or something?”

“W-Well, something along those lines...”

“Even though the size doesn’t fit you at all?”

“H-Haha, I can make myself really slim if I want to.”

“Ahaha, I see, glad to hear that...So, do you mind if I take a shower with you, Nii-san?”

“...Wha?”

“I’m still a bit sweaty from the training camp, so it should be fine, right?”

“O-Of course not.”

“Why?”

“I mean...”

“Would it be bad if I walked in there right now?”



“.....”

“Hey, Nii-san, just who is that girl that’s in there with you~?”

My little sister’s voice was shaking with anger and rage...Amen. It’s over. With my last ounce of determination, I reached for the door of the shower room, and locked the door. I’m holing up here. It’s a pathetic strategy, but if it allows me to live longer...

“Hmmm, Nii-san? Why’d you lock the door~?”

The knocks on the glass door reverberated through the shower room. Terrifying! I feel like this one movie called ‘The Shining’ had a similar scene in it. Or, Hitchcock’s ‘Psycho’. Depending on my choices, I might get turned into swiss cheese with a knife.

“So that’s how we’re playing this game? Then, I have my own ideas.” Kureha declared with an awfully cold voice, and put her hand on the doorknob.

“Aaaand...’Oomph<sup>3</sup>!”

Together with that voice, the doorknob twisted, and...Waaah!? It’s changing shape while raising shrieks of agony! What kind of raw strength is that! Also, you’re definitely not using magic, are you!

“...Sorry, Konoe, but I have a small request. If I die, could you please build a small grave beneath the cherry blossom tree at our school? I could rest easy if you came to visit once every year...” While leaving behind my testament, I reflected on the short life I had lived, sitting inside the bathtub.

I couldn’t help but be reminded about the scene of Kureha crushing the apple between her fingers. Ahh, that’ll be my head in a few seconds, I see. I’m sure that I’ll be more red than the Red Ranger.

“Don’t worry, Jirou!”

However, completely ignoring my despair, Konoe was fairly collected. Don’t tell me, does she have some secret idea for us to make it out of this—

“As long as we talk things out, we’ll be fine.”

“As if!”

“Hmpf, why would you say that. Kureha-chan is your little sister, right?”

“That’s exactly why she understands me better than nobody else!”

“I’m sure that if you show her your sincerity, she will forgive you.”

“Such a logical action won’t work against her, I can tell that much!”

We’re talking about my little sister who used me as a punching bag for the last ten years. Some appeasement policy won’t be helping me here, I just know it.

“Leave it to me. It’s a butler’s duty to protect their master!” Konoe said so, stood up, and headed towards the door.

Finally, the lock broke completely, and the doorknob fell to the ground. The final defence line had been destroyed. Right as I gulped in despair, the door slammed open.

“Uryaaa! Arrest! Arrest! The trial shall happen here, and not in court!” Kureha screamed, like she had witnessed a drug deal, as she stormed into the room.

She wore the same jersey as this morning, with a bandage reaching down from the elbow of her right arm. I guess she really broke her arm.

“...Wah?”

Right upon entering, Kureha’s eyes were glued to the person standing in front of her.

“Ko...K-K-Konoe-shenpai?” With a quivering mouth, my little sister tried her best to form these words.

At the same time, Konoe couldn’t be more relaxed, despite only wearing a single towel. The two looked at each other. Silence

followed. Finally, the tension was broken with—

“—Welcome back, young lady.”

With a perfect business smile, Subaru-sama lowered her head. After a few more seconds of silence...

“H-Hey! Kureha!”

Kureha splendidly fell backwards. No can do, her eyes are spinning. Not to mention that foam was coming out of her mouth, her arms and legs twitching. It seems like she lost consciousness because of the shock.

“See, everything worked out in the end.” That damn butler puffed out her chest like she just did the impossible.

“.....”

—I can tell you with full confidence that this wasn’t the end of it at all.

I sighed in relief because we averted the immediate danger, but I couldn’t help feel anxious towards the future of my Golden Week.

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1 Hajime no Ippo

2 Basically a chant about void, calmness, nothingness, etc

3 The original here is an attack called ‘バイキルト’, which apparently was translated to ‘Oomph’, so I kept that. It basically doubles an ally’s attack power.



# Chapter 3: Stray Husky

“...Fuwaaah...Mmm...Hmmm? Nii-san?”

“Yo. Morning, Kureha.”

Around one hour has passed since the incident in the shower room. Kureha was resting on the sofa in the living room when she opened her eyes, blinking a few times.

“Um...why am I here? I remember breaking my arm while fighting against a bear, and coming home, but...Hmm? I don’t remember what happened after that.”

There’s a chance. What good luck this is, she must have hit her head when she collapsed in the shower room.

“You laid down on the sofa, and probably fell asleep, don’t you think? You must have been tired. I already finished my bath, so you can take one.”

Of course, that was a blatant lie. After she collapsed in the shower room, Konoe and I carried her here. Naturally, I’m wearing some clothes right now.

“Mmm...I wonder. I don’t think I was that tired. Still, what a weird dream that was.”

“Dream?”

“Yeah. For some reason, Konoe-senpai was in our bath.”

“.....”

Damn it, it seems like not all memories are fully gone.

“And, I ran into Konoe-senpai there...”

“.....”

“Then, he said ‘Kureha-chan, let’s take a bath together’, and at the very end, I climbed up the stairs to adulthood...”

“You didn’t climb anything. Don’t worry, it was all just a dream.”

Half of that was indeed the truth, though. Luckily, the more inconvenient memories seem to have left her mind, though.

“Ahaha, that’s right. There’s no way that Konoe-senpai would be here. That had to have been a drea—”

“Phew, what a great bath.”

Kureha was interrupted by Konoe, who walked into the living room as she dried her hair with a towel. She was wearing a black pyjama she brought with her. After she helped carry Kureha over here, she went to take a bath herself. With this sight in front of her, Kureha’s eyes opened wide, like she couldn’t believe what she was seeing right now.

“H-Huh? Weird. Maybe my head is still messy because I just woke up, but I’m seeing this weird hallucination right now...”

She apparently had trouble grasping what she had in her view, as she rubbed her eyes several times. Accept it, my little sister, this is, albeit twisted, one part of reality.

“Have you woken up, my lady?” Konoe caught on to Kureha’s presence, and called out to her in her butler mode.

“N-Nya...”

At the same time...my family’s little monster let out a voice resembling a cat that just had its food stolen from, her mouth opening and closing in shock.

“W-Why ish Konoe-senpai here!?”

“Sorry, Kureha. He’ll be staying over at our place for a while.”

“S-Staying oveeeeeeeer!?”

It must have been a big shock for her, because Kureha turned into a real life version of 'The Scream'. Will she be okay? I hope she doesn't faint again.

"N-N-Nii-san!? What is this about!? Why is Konoe-senpai staying at our house!?"

"It's not that big of a shock, right. Konoe's a friend of mine. Kurose has stayed over at my place a few times before as well, remember?"

"Don't lump together Konoe-senpai with Kurose-senpai!"

Phew, that's pretty harsh, alright. That's just like she'd say 'Don't wash my underwear together with Dad's!'. I mean, Kurose might not be prince level at school, but still.

"N-Not to mention...Why is Konoe-senpai calling me 'my lady!'?"

"? Am I not allowed to?"

"No, if anything, that could become a habit...Wait, no! It's weird! That's almost like you became our butler!"

"Not almost, I truly did."

"...Wha?"

"As Jirou said, I will be staying here as your butler starting today."

"....."

She collapsed. Almost like she received a cross counter in boxing, Kureha fell over onto the living room floor. Normally, we'd need a gurney to safely carry her, but as she's the oldest daughter of the Sakamchi Family, she somehow recovered from the impact, and stood up on wobbly feet.

"S-So that means, Konoe-senpai has to listen to whatever my orders may be, right?"

"Yes, that is what it boils down to."

“T-Then, do you mind saying ‘I am Kureha-ojousama’s butler’ for me...!”

“...? Very well.” Subaru-sama showed a somewhat perplexed reaction, but continued nevertheless. “I am Kureha-ojousama’s bu—”

“No, let’s forget about that.” Kureha immediately interrupted Konoe. “Right now, just hearing that is way too stimulating. That’s why, you don’t need to keep up your polite language either.”

“Eh...”

“Please! I don’t want to go to heaven yet!”

Kureha must have been receiving a lot of damage from this, as she held down her chest, gasping for air. Not like I care, but you seem sick, my little sister.

“Are you okay, Kureha-chan?”

“Y-Yes, somewhat. But...why are you working as our butler, Konoe-senpai?”

“Why...that’s an odd question.” She paused. “—In order to pay with my body.” She said, like it was nothing questionable at all.

Yet again, she explained it with a choice of words that could easily be misunderstood...

“W-With your body...What does that mean?”

“Exactly what I said. I am the butler of this family—Jirou’s butler, so I’ll be servicing you to the best of my ability by using this body of mine.”

“B-But, you’re both boys, right?”

“You ask the weirdest things, Kureha-chan. Being boys doesn’t matter at all.”

“D-Doesn’t matter...” Kureha repeated Konoe’s words, letting out odd sounds like a broken tape recorder.



This is bad. She definitely has the wrong idea about this. At this rate, she'll assume that Konoe and I share a lovey-dovey boys' love together.

"C-Calm down, Kureha! Konoe and I aren't like that—"

"Nii-san, be quiet!" Kureha glared at me, her gaze filled with pressure.

Her eyes looked a bit dampened, as she turned towards Konoe, determination in her gaze.

"Konoe-senpai, what exactly did you do with Nii-san today?"

"What..." Konoe stayed silent for a moment.

...Thank god. All we did today was a bit of sparring in the dojo. If she properly explains that, Kureha won't have the wrong idea about our relationship anymore...

"Together we moved our bodies, and ended up drenched in sweat."

Right there, a cold sweat ran down my back. Um, excuse me, but that choice of words could be easily misunderstood I feel like...

"Y-You were drenched in sweat?"

"Yep. We were going at it all day."

"All day!?"

"Calm down, I know it might sound long, but mid-way Jirou said 'I've really gotten fired up now', so I had to join him."

"B-By the way, what exactly were you doing to get that sweaty?"

"A lot. Like pinning techniques."

"Pinning techniques!?"

"It would have been fine if we did it standing, but Jirou always had it end up like that. Jirou's bigger and stronger than me, so it was a lot of trouble to satisfy him."

“.....”

Listening to Konoe's nonchalant explanation, Kureha was yet again about to collapse. Alright, just give in. Fall over, and lose some more memories. Have them vanish to the ends of the universe, and never come back. However, that wish was not granted, as Kureha instead glared at me.

“Nii-san! I told you not to bring a girl over...but that doesn't mean you can do something like that to Konoe-senpai...to a boy...!”

“Y-You're wrong! You're misunderstanding!”

“What do you mean by misunderstanding! Not to mention...Nii-san is bigger...?”

“Oi, you damn brat! Why do you look so shocked! We're talking about body size, nothing else!”

“I...I know that! You forced that big body of yours onto Konoe-senpai, right!?”

“I wasn't! We were sparring! Everything Konoe talked about was just us sparring, and practicing! Since Konoe's a trained martial arts fighter, I had him help me train today!”

I tried my best to disarm this dangerous bomb in the making.

“S-Sparring?”

“That's right...You know how strong Konoe is, right? I was losing my touch as of late, so I had him fight me.”

“...Konoe-senpai, is that true?”

“Yeah, I was talking about us sparring but...what happened to you two? Especially Kureha-chan, your face is oddly red. You don't have a cold, do you?”

“N-No, of course not! I'll just go to my own room for a second!”  
Kureha left these words behind, and ran up to the second floor.

I took off my glasses, and wiped off the sweat building on my forehead. Finally, my cold sweat stopped pouring out. If this conversation continued for any longer, I might have died of dehydration.

“Also, why are you this tense? You were talking about some weird stuff just now.” I called out to Konoe.

Of course, the content was one thing, but the actual way she was speaking felt oddly awkward. If I had to give an example, it’s like the Konoe at school was here, with an attitude that won’t try to get too close to anybody but her own master, like a prince living in solitude. Or, the beautiful boy called Subaru-sama...

“...I can’t help it. I’m not too good at talking with her.”

“Not good...Why?”

I know that Kureha’s tension and energy is greatly different than the other people around us, but to think she was directly bad at dealing with her? I feel like Kureha is fairly easy to talk to.

“Don’t get the wrong idea, I don’t particularly hate her or anything. I enjoy talking with her, especially because she’s a girl around my age. However...”

“However?”

“Kureha-chan doesn’t know about my secret.”

That’s why I can’t help but feel tense with Kureha-chan around—Konoe muttered with a bit of a lonely tone. So that’s what it was? Konoe has to hide the fact that she’s a girl, which is why she won’t try to let anybody who doesn’t know, or can’t be allowed to know, get closer to her. After all, she’s scared of having her secret found out. And, the same must be the case when talking to Kureha.

“I guess I’m just too nervous. But, when I think of her finding out that I’m a girl, I just subconsciously adapt to a cold and distant attitude. Even though we’re both girls, and could talk so much more easily...” She explained with a grim expression.

What, that's it? She was worrying about something so simple?

"Hey now, that's nothing to be depressed about."

It's not anything that can't be resolved. After all, I'm right here. I'm someone who knows of Konoe's secret, and am her friend.

"You don't need to be so stiff. I'm aware of your secret, so I'll at least help you out."

That's right, I just have to help her. If Kureha comes close to finding out that Konoe is just wearing male clothing, I can provide a follow-up. It's the same in soccer or baseball. What's needed is teamplay, as everybody has their own weakness, and I just have to support that.

"That's why, you can relax some more. That'll make it easier for you, right?"

"...I'm sorry, Jirou." Konoe nodded.

Following that, I heard footsteps coming down the stairs. Alright, as long as I can keep Konoe's secret from her...

"...Wait, why'd you change your clothes?"

Seeing Kureha after she returned to the living room, I couldn't hold back a retort. She wore a white one-piece. It was an adorable design that had laces on its sleeves, making Kureha look like she was some kind of antique doll. She's going all out, huh. I bet her arm rupture must hurt, and yet she still was ready for everything.

"Ahaha, come on, don't be like that. This is what I always wear, right?"

"....."

No, you always wear the most casual clothes at home. Like a t-shirt and half pants. I can see that you put some effort into your hairstyle as well, so don't give me that.

"Hmmm? Nii-san, what's wrong, you look like you want to say something?" She spoke with a gentle smile.

However, deep in her eyes, there was a definite message written by sheer pressure. If I spill any unneeded info, I won't have a tomorrow. That's the feeling I get...I see, so Konoe isn't the only one who tries to be careful. Well, I guess this is just fine to keep a proper balance.

"Anyway, it's time for dinner."

The time of day had moved past 7pm. Because I was moving a lot throughout the day, I was feeling oddly starved.

"Right. Though I need to ask, why are there only apples in the kitchen? Is there some religious reason for that?" Konoe asked.

What kind of religion is that supposed to be? We don't pray to some apple god.

"Not quite, it's all for an apple diet. Kureha said that she gained wei—"

**Crack**, a terrifying sound coming from my bones breaking reached my ears—Ahh, my intestines! Kureha's iron claw was close to crushing my inner organs!

"Ahaha, the thing is, Nii-san seems to have gained a bit too much weight as of late, so I'm just trying to balance his nutrition some more."

"What, that was the reason? Aren't you considerate, Kureha-chan."

"Eh...ehehehe...considerate, haha..." Kureha fidgeted nervously in the face of Konoe's warm smile.

I wonder, I should be happy about this development, yet something was bothering me. Also, Kureha-san, could you please let go of my inner organs, you're going to crush them for good.

"It's too late to go shopping, so maybe we can just eat the cup of ramen we had this afternoon? I like them, so I don't mind."

"No, that won't do. Kureha actually hates—Agyaaaaah!"

It's going to come out! Stop, I beg you! My innards are going to say

hello to the world!

“Yes, I have no problem with that. I love cup ramen.”

“Then let’s do it like that...By the way, are you feeling okay, Jirou? Your face looks like you’re in pain for a while now.”

“No problem, yes. Nii-san is always like this before dinner. He must be hungry enough for his stomach and back to be cuddling.” Kureha said, and finally removed her hand.

That was dangerous, she was really trying to crush my intestines. My stomach and back were about to meet there for real. This aint Hikoboshi and Orihime during Tanabata.

While I held down my stomach to deal with the pain, Konoe prepared the cups of ramen. That damn Kureha, she’s even pouring the boiling water into her desired cup. Normally, she’d hate it so much, but she’s trying to show off how mature she is to Konoe. After three minutes of waiting, our three cups of cup ramen were done.

“Time to dig in.”

After giving my gratitude to the Ace \*up for simply existing, I slurped up some of the noodles. Ahh, what a blessing this is. Even eating several cups a day, it still is delicious.

“Auu...”

Looking at my side, Kureha seemed to be struggling against the cup of ramen. Seems like she can’t fully catch the noodles. Weird, was she always this bad at using chopsticks?

“...Ah.”

I see. Because of the injury, she can’t properly use her dominant arm. Now she’s forced to use her left hand. Because of clumsy movement, the noodles fell back into the cup several times. Alright, can’t be helped then.

“Your noodles will stretch like this. Come on, let me feed you.” I used my chopsticks, carrying some noodles to Kureha’s mouth.

“Eh, don’t do that. I’m not some baby.”

“Stop complaining, and open that mouth.”

“Ahhhh...Ah, hot!”

“Oh, crap. Sorry, I’ll try to have it cool down next time.”

“Auuu...be careful, I really like these clothes, okay.”

“I won’t splash soup on you. Instead...Yeah, miso soup is working just fine.”

“Ah, not fair, Nii-san! You’re stealing my miso!”

“I was just having a taste. You won’t starve, don’t worry.” Gently breathing on the noodles, I carried some food to Kureha’s mouth.

Hmm, it feels like I’m feeding some small chick. There’s also the part of us sharing an indirect kiss, but we’re family, so no problem. Kureha ignored my grin, and munched up the noodles.

“...Not fair.”

I heard a quiet protest. Looking over, I saw Konoe giving us a somewhat distanced gaze.

“What, did you want to taste the miso soup as well?”

Currently, Konoe was eating noodles with soy sauce. Maybe she’d rather prefer miso after all?

“N-No, that’s not it. How do I say this, you two really are close, huh.” Konoe muttered with a somewhat displeased tone, as she slurped up her noodles.

She could just be honest and say she wants miso. Holding back isn’t good for her body. But, right as I reached for some more noodles for me—

**Gruuuuuuuumble.**

I heard an odd sound near me.

“...That just now was...”

The sound of a stomach? But, it's a bit different compared to the one before...

“W-Why would you immediately look at me! That wasn't me!”

When I reflexively looked over at Konoe, she just blushed and glared back at me. But then, who was that? It definitely wasn't me. Couldn't be Kureha either. I would have heard that more clearly. That would mean—

“N-Nii-san!” Right as I wanted to figure out the location of that voice, Kureha screamed. “You finished dinner, so how about you take a bath?”

“No, I'm fine. I just took one after all.”

Also I'm not done yet, my cup of ramen is still half full, don't you see?

“Don't be like that. I'll join you if you desperately want me to.”

“Why is that the conclusion you arrive at?”

“I mean, you wrote ‘It's my dream to take a bath with my little sister’ in your grade school graduation book, right?”

“Who said that!? Don't fabricate fake dreams of mine!”

What kind of awful graduate would I be? If anything, it'd probably be better for me to repeat grade school if that was really the case.

“If anything, you go take a bath. Konoe and I have already finished ours.”

“Eh...I-I'm fine, still! There's something I need to do after this...”

“Something you need to do?”

“Ah...” Kureha awkwardly averted her gaze.

...Odd. Normally she never holds back at anything. That almost



sounds like...

“Hey, Kureha.”

“W-What is it, Nii-san?”

“You’re...hiding something from me, right?”

“Eep.”

“.....”

...Huh. First time I’ve seen someone this open like a book. I don’t know how to feel about that, her being my blood-related little sister. However, there’s no doubt now that Kureha is hiding something. I wonder what it is. If I had to guess, it’s probably related to that sound I heard just now.

**Scratch scratch scratch...**

Yet again, an odd sound reverberated inside the living room. This time it was different from before, like someone was scratching something. When I looked towards the location I heard it from, I spotted Kureha’s backpack she had brought home from the training camp.

“Hm?”

I feel like...it looks a bit inflated.

“A-Ah! Don’t look!” Kureha shot up from the chair, and raised the backpack with one hand.

Even then, something inside the backpack was moving, almost like it tried to escape to the outside world.

“Ah...No! Don’t leave...!” Kureha tried her best to hold back what was inside the bag, but that didn’t work too well with only one hand.

Shortly after, I spotted the black tip of a nose from the small gap between the zipper.

“...Wha?”

Finally, that living being pushed its entire head through the opening. It possessed black and white fur, with glass marbles as eyes. At the same time, its facial features had somewhat of a fierce look—It was a Siberian husky.

The small Siberian husky pup moved its nose through the air, audibly sniffing around.

♀ × ♂

“Please, Nii-san! I’ll properly look after it, so can I keep it!?”

With dampened eyes, Kureha practically begged me with her gaze directed upwards. She carried the small pup in her hands, who let out a yawn. I think it’s like two to three months old. According to what Kureha said, she picked it up on the way home from the hospital. Since it doesn’t have a collar around its neck, I really can’t tell if it’s just a runaway dog or a stray dog...

“Don’t you worry, my little sister, I won’t tell you to put it back where you found it.”

“...Nii-san!” Kureha’s eyes lit up.

I returned a smile, trying to emphasize as much positive affection as I could.

“Now then, where’s that cardboard box I kept around?”

“Waaaaah! You liar! You’re fully intent on throwing it out!”

“I was joking. Don’t take everything I say for bare gold.”

“Demon! Devil! That joke was just awful! What color is your blood, huh!?”

“...Aren’t you the person who causes bloodshed in my room every morning? You should know best.”

“Urk...D-Don’t avert the topic! Why do you have such a horrible

personality!? I'd love to see the face of your parents!"

"Haven't you seen that plenty already?"

We have the same parents, remember? Or, are you saying that I was actually adopted? That would actually make a lot of sense, huh.

"Uuu...Noo! That pup will become my younger brother!" Kureha started sniffing loudly, and tightly embraced the dog.

What to do. This one's gonna be troublesome.

"Listen, Kureha. Even if he's small and cute right now, he'll grow soon enough. It's a Siberian husky after all. Keeping that would be more than bothersome."

"T-That's not true. Even once it grows up, we'll always play together."

"Play..."

"I'm sure that this puppy will be able to bear with all my training."

"You plan on using it as your punching bag!?"

"I'll call it Patrasche."

"Don't give it a name that has no connection at all!"

"Then, Hachi."

"You're expecting for it to die, huh!?"

How cruel. I can already see that poor puppy's fate, namely dying because of Kureha's techniques.

"Listen, even if you try to convince me with wrestling techniques, nothing will change. What about the money for the food? Will you send Mom a letter, asking for a larger allowance? I bet she'll be angry if she finds out you're keeping a dog with no permission."

"Nya..."

“Listen. Keeping a pet means you have to take care of it for the rest of your life. That’s why, you can’t just take in a pet with half-baked feelings. You get that, right?”

“...I-I know that...” Kureha lowered her head, still holding the puppy.

I know I might sound cold saying all of that, but I’m trying to be the voice of reason here. In order to keep a living being as a pet, you need determination. Even more so if it’s a puppy that will grow up to become a large dog. I feel like he’d be much happier in the north than in such a small home.

“Konoe, you say something as well.”

In order to be more convincing, I asked Konoe for help. As the butler of this home, she should know what’s most important now. With that thought, I turned towards her—

“Kureha-chan...could you let me carry that puppy?”

Said butler’s passionate gaze was glued to the small dog...Oh for crying out loud. So that dog already put its poisonous fangs into my butler.

“Stop, Konoe! This is a trap! Don’t touch that dog!”

“What are you talking about, Jirou? This cute thing could never be a dog.”

“Excuse me!?”

No matter how I look at it, that do be a dog. Konoe however ignored my warning, and approached the dog.

“...Waaah, so fluffy...” She tightly embraced it.

I bet those fierce facial features of a Siberian husky must have gotten her good. Her sense and interests are definitely not orthodox.

“Jirou, I know that keeping it forever might be impossible, but you could at least have it stay over Golden Week, right? During that time,

you can search for someone else to take it in.”

Urk...

“Ah, what a wonderful idea, Konoe-senpai. You’re fine with that right, Nii-san:”

Because of Konoe’s proposition, Kureha seemed to have regained some life, and the two surrounded the puppy, utterly spoiling it. It’s like I’m watching the creation of the alliance between Germany and Italy during the Second World War, live from the pole position. Not good. As the oldest man of this family, I need to keep up my dignity.

“Jirou, why don’t you try touching it as well?” Konoe pushed the puppy, with its wagging tail, towards me.

Don’t bring that thing too close to me...!

“You can’t, Konoe-senpai. Nii-san can’t deal with dogs.”

**Twitch.**

“He was bitten by a stray dog in kindergarten, so he’s been living with a trauma ever since.”

“H-Hey, Kureha!”

I can’t believe her! This damn little sister of mine! She’s revealing her older brother’s embarrassing past like it’s nothing!

“Hmm, really. I wonder why? This puppy is so cute.”

“Right~”

The animal-loving group of the two continued to spoil the puppy with smiles. It’s a regime change. With a single Siberian husky, our family received a new idol, and I was overthrown. Damn it, I’m so jealous...Wait, no. Why do I feel so bitter towards a dog, just because he gets all the attention from two girls.

“Hey, Jirou.” While carrying the puppy, Konoe looked up at me. “Do you really plan on throwing out this dog?”

“N-Not exactly...”

“The nights during May can be pretty cold, so if it had to stay outside today, it’ll definitely catch a cold.”

“Since it’s a dog, it won’t catch colds like a human...”

“Not to mention that it must have been lonely, all alone. Since I was thrown out myself, I really understand what it’s going through...”

“.....”

“So please, Jirou...”

“...! Alright, I get it. Only through Golden Week, okay. Once that’s done, it’ll be out the next day.” I said, and averted my gaze from Konoe.



...Damn it. That's not fair. If you look up at me with that expression, there's no way I can say no.

"Yaay, I love Nii-san!"

Kureha must have been happy, as she clung to my waist. Please, stop. You know about my gynophobia, right?

“L-Let go already!”

“Nyahaha, what’s the problem, we’re siblings, right!” So she said, snuggling up to me like a puppy.

In her case, this kind of skinship is a common occurrence, but I still can’t get used to it. Being used as her training partner for her wrestling techniques would still be better.

“...Hmpf.” For some reason, Konoe still seemed displeased about something.

What, do you want to be hugged by Kureha that badly? I don’t mind, just please take over for me.

“...Jeez.”

Either way, with this another chaotic day comes to an end. Thinking about it, a lot happened. Konoe suddenly showed up, Kureha abruptly came home, and we got a new family member...It’s a lot to take in. In all honesty, it’s a lot different from what I had imagined would happen, but a few chaotic days like these won’t hurt. At the very least, I won’t be bored... as long as no new problems arise, of course—

Tra la la la la~

Right as I was thinking that, I heard an ominous sound from my phone. Yet again, the Godfather theme played, almost as if the person was waiting for me to think that. Naturally, there’s only one person I could be talking about...

“...Urk.”

Confirming the screen, the name that appeared was—Suzutsuki, as expected. What kind of timing is this...What does she want now? Albeit feeling hesitant, I accepted the call.

“Jirou-kun, you should probably properly lock up your front door, it’s not safe.”

Hearing that voice, I was baffled. After all, I heard Suzutsuki’s voice



not through the phone, but from right behind me.

“...!”

When I turned around in shock, I spotted a girl with black hair, tied up into twintails. She wore black clothes, with a white skirt. Because her clothes were oddly tight, it really emphasized her voluptuous line, but the air she gave off was pretty much the one of a rich lady—Suzutsuki Kanade.

She stood in the doorframe of the living room with her phone in hand, showing an elegant smile. For some reason, she even had a large bag on the floor next to her. And then, she showed a teasing grin like a child whose prank had succeeded.

“...I came~”

“What are you talking about?”

“Were you waiting for me~?”

“No way in hell!”

“Fufu, your retorts come flying as fast as always.” Suzutsuki walked into the living room with a relaxed attitude she would always show.

Even Konoe and Kureha were shocked by this sudden visitor, staring at her. It seems like this happening out of the blue was too much even for them. Only after a bit did Konoe manage to open her mouth.

“Young lady...Why are you here?” The butler asked.

Listening to this question by her own servant, Suzutsuki showed a calm smile.

“Why? Isn’t that obvious? Just like you, I came here to serve Jirou-kun’s family.”

**Boooooom!** It felt like a nuclear bomb exploded inside my head. Not to mention that this caused the beginning of the 3rd World War.

“S-Serve my family...”

Why? She wasn't chased out, was she.

"Don't worry, I properly ran away from home before coming here."

"You ran away on purpose!?"

"I didn't want to be left out from all this fun. That would just be too cruel, you know?"

"....."

What a woman she is. That's Devil Suzutsuki for you, she actually pushed her will through. I should have sprayed some salt around my house beforehand after all. Then again, she'd probably break through any barricade.

"Naturally, I won't be asking to stay here for free, okay."

"Wha?"

.....No no no, hold on. I feel like we had this conversation before. I can practically taste the deja-vu. Back then, Konoe said she'd become my butler, and...

"That's why—starting today, I will be working here as your maid."

"....."

"Order me whatever you may please, dear master." Suzutsuki grabbed the hem of her skirt to lift it up, and showed a polite bow.

After a solid ten seconds, while being forced to stare down reality, a terrifying nightmare, in the face, my brain started moving again.

"Are you kidding meeeeeee!?" Like a wolfman howling at the moon, I screamed. "Go home! Right now!"

"How cruel...You accepted Subaru immediately, but not me?"

"Your goal is completely different from Konoe's after all!"

Konoe is simply trying to repay me, which is why she's acting as my butler right now. However, in Suzutsuki's case, it's all just self-

interest because ‘Oh, this looks interesting’ is her main driving force, nothing more. I need to immediately act against that.

“Do you hate the idea that much? Or, would you rather not have someone like me as a maid?”

“Urk...”

As Suzutsuki’s face pulled closer to mine, the words got stuck in my throat.

“Hey, Jirou-kun?” With a voice sweet enough to rival hot chocolate, Suzutsuki called out my name.

This is bad, my heart feels like it’s about to break. She’s still coming closer, with a never-ending smile. If I were to keep her as a maid, my days of bliss would be guaranteed. However, I can’t be deceived. We’re still talking about Devil Suzutsuki, the wolf wearing sheep’s clothing. She’s calculative enough to even fake a marriage if it would get her to her goal.

What would happen if she became my maid? My family would be destroyed like a tornado blew through the house. I need to avoid such a pleasure-crime at all costs...!

“Anyway, no is my answer! I already have Konoe, he’s plenty of a servant!” I said, half in a panic.

Thinking about it, Konoe hasn’t really done anything butler-like ever since she came here today, but this is this, and that is that. For now, I just need to chase her away—

“I see, I understand.” Surprisingly enough, Suzutsuki calmly nodded along to my declaration. “Basically, this is what you’re saying, right? An average family home like this doesn’t need two servants.”

“Y-Yeah, that’s right. I already have Konoe, so you don’t have to—”

“Then, let’s make this a competition.”

“...Excuse me?”

Because of this unexpected word popping up in her response, my thought process came to an abrupt halt.

“It’s simple. If you don’t need two servants here at this average family home, then we have to confirm who is more worthy of staying here.”

“Y-Young lady...?” Konoe seemed to share my confusion, but Suzutsuki showed an invincible smile.

“This...is war, Subaru. Butler VS Maid. We’ll measure who is more fit to serve Jirou-kun.” She pointed at Konoe.

It was a fully-fledged declaration of war, no matter how you looked at it.

“.....”

...I mean, I should have guessed that this wouldn’t end well.



# Chapter 4: Butler and Maid

“Good morning, Jirou-kun.”

The following day, upon waking up, I headed to the living room, only to be greeted by Suzutsuki—in a maid uniform.

“...!”

Hey now, why are you wearing these clothes first thing in the morning, oi.

“How does it look? I bought this before coming here...I’m not sure if it looks good on me.” Suzutsuki twirled on the spot, which made her skirt flutter.

It was an apron dress with frills all over, with a black and white contrast as its base, oddly fitting with her black hair. No matter what you may say, she definitely looks like a maid. However, deep inside, she still is Suzutsuki Kanade, a rich lady with too much money on her hands. And now, she’s a maid...It doesn’t make any sense. What kind of comical gap is this...it’ll make my heart skip a beat.



“Are you okay? You look a bit pale. Are you lacking some sleep by any chance?” Suzutsuki approached me, and took a close look at my face.

.....No no no no. What is that person saying?

“...The reason I’m low on sleep is because of you, remember?” I answered, while trying my best to keep a yawn from coming out.

Can you blame me? You forced me through that kind of situation after all. Sleeping together with that Subaru-sama is just too much...

♀ × ♂

“Hey, are you seriously planning on sleeping here?”

“Of course, there’s no other way around this.” Konoe responded with a bit of a displeased tone.

Although she’s wearing male clothing right now, I bet she must have some kind of resistance towards sleeping with a boy in the same room. Standing in front of the door to my room, Subaru-sama had her arms crossed, her lips forming a  $\wedge$  shape. Naturally, the origin of this problem was none other than Suzutsuki Kanade.

Because she barged into this place, we ran out of rooms to give her. She really is the incarnation of the devil after all. Wherever she goes, there’s trouble.

“I-I’m coming in.”

Konoe must have been nervous, as she walked into my room like a new inspector would into a murder scene. She was still wearing that black pajama from before. I’d assume that she bought it with her own upcoming growth in consideration, because it was pretty baggy. In her hand she had a sheep plush toy.

Despite looking pretty fashionable, it had sharp teeth, and a red mouth—It’s name is the Silent Sheep. It’s a terrifying yet cute being that most likely was based upon that one professor appearing in that movie. Konoe apparently is absolutely infatuated with this plush toy, and can’t even sleep without it.

I don’t mind her having such a girly part to her, but I just can’t relax with that thing in the same room as me. It’s like one of those Japanese dolls with growing hair, I’m afraid it might strangle me while I’m sleeping.

“Maybe you really should be sleeping in Mom’s room? We can have Suzutsuki sleep on the living room sofa.”



“Don’t be ridiculous. I can’t allow the young lady to sleep at such a place. If anything, I shall sleep on the sofa.”

“But Kureha forbid you from doing that.”

The reason is the exact same Konoe had with Suzutsuki. ‘You can’t allow Konoe-senpai to sleep on the sofa’, or something like that. When I asked her why Konoe can’t just sleep in Suzutsuki’s room, my little sister slammed a crescent moon kick right into my ribcage.

Thinking about it, Kureha doesn’t know that Konoe is a girl. So, she wouldn’t want the boy she likes to sleep in the same room as a girl.

“But, why do you have to sleep in my room then...”

“W-What else am I supposed to do! Kureha-chan thinks I’m a boy, so if I was against sleeping in your room, she might start to doubt me.”

I mean, I get where you’re coming from. It’s nothing odd for two boys to sleep in the same room. When Kurose came over, he’d sleep in my room as well. Well, we played games all night, so we didn’t exactly sleep.

“Also, just to let you know...” Konoe gave me a sharp gaze. “If you attempt anything weird, I’ll kill you.”

“...I won’t.”

I seriously won’t. The lineup of rooms on the second floor goes Kureha > Me > Suzutsuki, so I’m pretty much cornered on both sides. It wouldn’t be weird for the two of them to keep their ears to the walls, trying to pick up pieces of the conversation. What would happen if I actually tried to lay my hands on Konoe? Let alone being able to fall asleep, I would sleep for all eternity.

I took out a futon from the closet in my room, and opened it up on the floor.

“Then, good night. I’ll be sleeping here, so you feel free to use my bed.” I said, and snuggled into the blanket.

“W-Wait, Jirou!”

However, Konoe stopped me monetarily. I wonder why, but it sounded like she was panicking there.

“Why are you not sleeping in your own bed?”

“Eh? I mean, I kept this futon in the closet for ages, so it’s dusty and smelly. Just use my bed, will you?”

“But...” Konoe closely inspected the bed, followed by a single phrase. “I can’t sleep like this...”

“Hm? Can’t sleep with a different pillow or something?”

“N-Not exactly...Just, sleeping in your bed is...” Konoe awkwardly averted her gaze.

I wonder, does she hate the idea of sleeping in my bed that much? That kind of hurts, can’t lie.

“Do you want to sleep over here then?”

“...No, it’s fine.”

After her anxious gaze wandered across the room, Konoe finally seemed to have made up her mind, and slipped into my bed. However, she didn’t lie on her stomach or back, but rather sideways, which took me by surprise. It almost felt like she wanted to hide her face from me, as she had her body turned towards the wall.

“...This really smells like Jirou.”

“Huh? Well, yeah, I use it every day.”

“.....”

Without answering, Konoe covered her head with the blanket, and curled up like a cat. Does she not like the idea of me seeing her sleeping face?

“Then, night.” I spoke up to the rolled-up blanket, and turned off the lights.

I wanted to fall asleep quickly, so I immediately closed my eyes, but I still can't calm down after all. At first I thought it was because of the eerie sheep, which might make me suffer from sleep paralysis, but I soon caught on to the main reason—The sweet scent of shampoo that tickled my nose.

Mm, that's Kureha's expensive shampoo for you, it's completely different from the cheap one I'm using. If I had to say...it smells more like a girl. And now, this very scent was carried over to me, with Konoe as its origin.

“.....”

Not good, I've gotten completely conscious of her. She might be wearing male clothing most of the time, but she still is a girl...Ahh, calm down, me. Why is my heart racing just because of her scent? Alright, let me just count sheeps, that'll definitely help me fall asleep. Of course, not that one particular sheep, but the perfectly normal type you can find anywhere. I felt embarrassed, and turned my back towards Konoe, just as she did, taking deep breaths. That's right, as long as I can focus, I can fall asleep soon enough...

“\_\_”

The ticking sound of the wall clock sounded like loud drumming in my ears. How much time passed like this, I wonder. It's already past midnight according to the clock. Never in my life did I pray more than now that I could just peacefully fall asleep.

There, I heard faint breathing from my bed. What was that about not being able to fall asleep, you damn butler. Well, she had to camp out last night in some public park, so I bet she was lacking precious sleep. Though, I feel like she's a bit too relaxed, I had an all-nighter myself just last night.

“...Also, couldn't I have just slept on the sofa?”

It was clearly too late, but that thought just escaped my lips. No, maybe it actually isn't? I feel like I'll definitely sleep much more comfortably on that sofa than here. That's why I decided to act quickly. So that I wouldn't wake up Konoe, I tried my best to slip out

of the futon without making a sound. I felt like an Iga Ninja, killing the sound of my movement.

“...Fuwaaah...”

Right as I was about to make it out, I heard a faint voice behind my back. I subconsciously turned around, and spotted a silhouette in the darkness—Konoe, as she had her upper body lifted from the bed. Crap, did I wake her up...

“Mm...Jirou...where are you going?” She must have been a bit dazed from waking up, because her voice sounded rather listless.

“Need to visit the toilet really quickly.”

Naturally, that was a lie. If I said that I couldn’t sleep, and planned to sleep on the sofa instead, she’d probably feel the need to be considerate of me. She technically is my butler right now after all.

“...That’s a lie.”

However, said butler apparently saw right through my lie. Damn it, that’s Subaru-sama, I didn’t think she would figure it out that easily. Whatever, I’ll just tell her the truth.

“You say that...but in reality, you’ll go to the young lady’s room, right.”

“...Wha?”

“You don’t need to hide it...You damn pervert. If you want to go to her room, you need to defeat me first...!”

“.....”

Alright, this is bad. It’d probably be better for me if I ran away. But, right as I judged so—

“Gueh!?”

Slender arms wrapped around my neck from behind my back. Following that, they put pressure on my trachea. This is the position

of a wrestling move, a choke sleeper.

“I’m not...not letting you go...I will protect the young lady...”  
Konoe’s voice reached up to my ears.

Oh crap, she’s more sleepy and dozy than I previously thought. She thinks that I’m about to head over to Suzutsuki’s room for a secret rendez-vous...

“S-Stop, I’m not going to Suzutsuki’s room...”

“...What did you saaay?”

I tried my utmost to explain myself, to which I felt the pressure on my neck lessening...Ahh, thank god. At this rate, I might have gotten the late-night train up to heaven. Right as I felt relieved, I took some deep breaths, when...

“Don’t tell me...is it Kureha-chan’s room?”

This time, Konoe embraced me from behind, wrapping her arms around my torso.

“You absolute deviant...Even if you’re close, you can’t just lay your hands on your actual little sister...”

“Wha...What are you talking about, you stupid butler! There’s no way I would...Waaaah!?” Suddenly, my body felt like I was floating.

Surprisingly enough, Konoe put a lot of strength into her arms in order to raise my body, and then slammed my back onto the ground—A backdrop. It’d make even the most evil pro-wrestler shudder in fear.

“Guah!?”

I readied myself against the impact, but luckily landed on the soft bed. However, danger hadn’t passed just yet. Despite having thrown my body backwards, Konoe was still holding onto it.

“If you want it that way, then fine by me...I’ll make you pass out because of your gynophobia symptoms...!”

Heek! Despite being drowsy, she sure knows how to threaten me. I didn't think she would use that weakness of mine...! However, just as she announced, Konoe tightly clung to my body, putting more strength into her arms.

T-This is bad. The drifting scent of shampoo, her breathing hitting my nape, and this softness, albeit a bit reserved, sensation hitting my back...

"...Huh?"

Is she not wearing her corset beneath her pyjamas? I mean, it'd make sense for her not to wear it when she's sleeping? After all, this sensation touching my back through the thin fabric is almost like—

"Guhaaa!?"

There, a warm sensation made my nose tense up. It's my nosebleed building up. At this rate, I'll create a second red sea with the blood from my own body.

"How's this...You finally realized...this is the true strength of a butler...!"

Konoe's voice slowly started to fade out. Instead, faint breathing returned. It seems like she used up all of her strength, and fell asleep. Even so, I can't break free of her hold. At the same time, the floodgates of my nose had broken fully, and the entire Amazon River ran down my face, dropping to the floor. That being said, I can't afford to blank out here.

If I lost consciousness here, I'd be staying in this position the entire time, all the way until morning. And once I wake up, Konoe will have the wrong idea. She'll think that I slipped into the bed with her, and did some lewd stuff like some molesting bastard, cutting me up with a chainsaw.

In order to avoid this future, I needed to break free out of this hold, and distance myself from this situation. Once I'm free, I'll go to the living room, yeah. With this hope, which pretty much begged for a death flag, I tried escaping that soft sensation hitting my back. That's

right, once I make it to the living room, I should be able to get some sound sleep...

♀ × ♂

“...No way I could sleep, yeah.”

End of flashback. The result is exactly as you could see, I pulled another all-nighter. As expected, I could not break free of Konoe's hold, and spent the rest of the night in that position. I somehow managed to make it out when morning came around, but it took until the birds were singing outside. It honestly felt like I was being tortured. Add my lack of sleep to the equation, my head just feels like it's going to explode any second.

“Also, couldn't you have just slept in Kureha's room?” I gulped down some milk while asking Suzutsuki.

Kureha is keeping that stray puppy in her room, but there still should have been enough space.

“No can do, that wouldn't be enough of a handicap.”

“Wha?”

“The contest has already begun. Subaru's main profession is to be a servant, so I'd have no chance without a small handicap, don't you think?”

That damn Devil Suzutsuki. In hindsight of today's competition, she had Konoe sleep in my room. She was probably aiming for Konoe to end up with a lack of sleep, and to give herself some advantage. What kind of evil genius are you? You're even making me suffer, despite that not being your original goal.

“More importantly, Jirou-kun.” Suddenly, Suzutsuki grew really quiet. “You used protection, right?”

I spit out the milk in my mouth like I was a fountain.

“What's that reaction about? Are you telling me that you didn't?”

“As if I didn’t!”

“So you properly used protection.”

“Nothing happened, okay! Whatever you’re thinking of, didn’t happen!”

“You didn’t even sleep in the same futon?”

“O-Of course we didn’t!?”

I wasn’t lying. We were in the same bed, but I wasn’t sleeping.

“What, really? Thank god. I would have had to take drastic measures otherwise.” Suzutsuki-san flashed an awfully cold and terrifying smile.

What drastic measures might you be talking about? I’d love to hear about that, but I feel like I won’t gain anything even if I did, so I’ll just read the mood and stay quiet.

“Morning, Nii-san.” Kureha walked into the living room.

She carried the small puppy in her arms, its tail wagging lively. It sure has gotten used to living here, huh.

“...Hm?”

I feel like...there’s something around its neck, something like an apparatus I haven’t seen before. Is that a collar? That’s pretty unrefined.

“Ah, that’s a BowLingual.”

“A what?”

“Basically, it’s a device that can translate a dog’s barks and howling into human words. I heard that you picked up a stray dog, so I brought the one device we kept at my residence.” Suzutsuki explained, as she stuffed her cheeks with apples.

“It’s amazing. I can actually tell what Kojirou is saying.”



“Huh.”

Also...Kojirou, is it? After yesterday's declaration of war from Suzutsuki, we sat all together and tried to come up with a name for the puppy, but with no results to state here. Can't say I'm shocked, looking at Konoe's abysmal naming sense. She came up with names like 'Liver', 'Offal', or 'Steak'. Why's it all related to meat? They'll think of us as weirdos.

Then again, Kureha wasn't much better, with names like 'Hansen', 'Brody', or 'Andre'. Of course, all of these are names of famous foreign pro-wrestlers. I guess she wants to make that poor pupper a wrestler as well. Of course, can't forget about Suzutsuki either, she only threw out names like 'Ed', 'Roy', and 'Alex'. Yeah, I get it already, you love manga. But, there's no need to give that poor pupper those names<sup>1</sup>.

The discussion was a difficult voyage, lasting a solid two and a half hours. Eventually, we came up with 'Kojirou'. It sounds like a name you'd give to someone who runs off to fight at Ganryuujima<sup>2</sup>, but as you might expect, I was the one who came up with it. Never would have imagined that I'd get myself a younger brother at such an age.

'I'm hungry~'

There, I heard a female voice that could have come right out of an anime. Turning around, Kureha was about to feed Kojirou with some dog food (that Suzutsuki brought with her). Every time the dog barked, that device translated it, and played it with somewhat of a human voice. This country sure has come a long way. Especially its democracy. To think we could hear the opinions of dogs this soon. This is actually pretty fun.

“Kureha, let me talk with him some more.”

“Sure, you go look after Kojirou then, I'll eat breakfast.” She said, and headed towards the table.

Now then, what should I do? This is my first experience talking with a dog, my first contact. If I was talking with a human, I'd ask where they come from and what their hobbies are, but that's not what I'm

expecting here. Hence...

“Morning, Kojirou.”

I went for a simple greeting first. In return, Kojirou let out an energetic ‘Woof’ back at me. After a brief moment of silence, the adorable anime voice spoke up again...

‘Shut it, brat.’

“!”

‘Don’t think you can suddenly talk to me like that.’

“.....”

‘Are you even aware of your own position? You’re the bottom dog of this results-based society.’

“A dog called me a dog!?” Met with this response, I was bewildered.

What’s this guy’s problem? I was just trying to talk to him! Also, he’s saying this much despite only barking with a short ‘Woof!?’

“What’s wrong, Nii-san. You don’t have to scream like that.” While munching on an apple, Kureha returned.

“K-Kureha? Isn’t this dog weird as hell? I feel like he’s pretty knowledgeable in Japan’s strict education...”

“Ehhh? Not at all. Right, Kojirou?” Kureha called out to Kojirou with a smile, to which he barked twice.

‘Save me, Onee-chan! This person is bullying me!’

“Wha!?”

‘He’s been giving me this evaluating gaze for a long time now...’

“.....”

‘Guhehe, what a nice body you have, is what he’s been saying with some creepy laugh!’

“What are you talking about!?”

This guy’s definitely weird! He’s pressing false charges on a human! Not to mention that he’s trying to get Kureha against me!

“Nii-san! I know you don’t like dogs, but you can’t bully Kojiro!”

“Are you an idiot!? That’s not what you should be retorting on!”

“W-What do you mean idiot! Alright, no breakfast for you, Nii-san!”  
Kureha was fuming with anger, and cleaned up the dining table.

Ahh, my breakfast...Goodbye, my apples for the day...

‘—As planned.’

“!?”

When I heard that faint voice, my head shot downwards, only to find Kojiro looking like he was grinning at me...Scarry. He might not be a normal dog after all. If so, then I should probably sell it off to some TV circus show. He can basically talk without barking right now.

“...Hm?”

Wait a second. What is there to translate if he isn’t even barking? This BowLingual should only be translating barks.

“No...thinking about it, what he’s been saying was odd for a while now.”

I can’t believe the manufacturer of that device put these kinds of phrases and voices in there...That would mean...I directed my gaze towards the shadow of the table. There, I spotted a certain maid talking into a small device in her hand.

‘Ahaha, I was found out.’

“So the criminal was you after all!”

‘Shut up, you brat!’

“You shut up! Just because you’re a dog doesn’t mean you’re just

allowed to say whatever you want!”

“This week’s Bikkuri Dokkiri Mecha~’

“Punishment~<sup>3</sup> ...Wait, what are you making me say!”

Damn it, once you understand the trick, it’s simple. Basically, everything I thought this dog has been saying actually came from Suzutsuki.

‘Pretty clever, right? Most BowLingual devices are pretty boring, so I tried adding a transceiver, and remodeled it.’ Suzutsuki laughed with the voice of a cute anime girl.

Sorry, Kojirou, that cold-blooded beast over there was at fault. You can bite me once, I will forgive you.

“Also, do you really intend on having a competition against Konoe?”

Butler vs Maid, I still don’t quite see the reason for that. I feel like it’s all just to cope with that woman’s boredom. Well, it might be fun watching from afar.

“Of course. My goal is to make Subaru come back to the residence.”

“Come back?”

“That’s right. Once she gets chased out of here, she definitely has to come back to the residence. I doubt she wants to spend another night like a stray sheep. That’s why...I definitely can’t lose here. No matter what method I might have to resort to, as well.” Suzutsuki seemed to be burning with a calm, but definite passion.

Hmm, I guess Konoe has some reason that won’t let her go back to the residence. Not to mention that it’s probably pretty personal. If she was simply chased out, then Suzutsuki wouldn’t be this desperate either. Still, what a devious plot. She wants Konoe to taste the warmth of a home, only to rob her of that again, all to motivate her in returning home.

It felt like this was taking things too far for good, but...well, not like I’m in a position where I could object. After all...and this is just a

secret between the two of us, but...apparently Konoe is Suzutsuki's first love. Now calm down, I was just shocked when I heard about it last month. We're talking about two girls after all, even if Konoe is wearing a man's uniform. It might just be Suzutsuki's nonsense again, but it would explain a lot of things. After all, she came here to take back the person she likes.

"Young lady." An alto voice reverberated inside the living room.

When I turned my gaze towards that source, there stood Konoe Subaru. Naturally, she was wearing her butler uniform. Clad in black and white, she only gave Suzutsuki the time of the day.

"Let me be upfront. Even if it's you, I definitely can't afford to lose this competition."

Ohh, I guess Konoe has her own pride as a butler on the line here. She's absolutely serious. Does Suzutsuki even have a chance...

"What a coincidence, I feel the same way. But, there's one thing I need to clarify before this competition starts."

"...? What might that be?" Konoe asked, slightly confused.

In the face of that, Suzutsuki continued with an awfully cold voice.

"Don't refer to me as 'young lady'."

"!"

"Did you not think about it? Right now, you're the butler of this home, not mine. That's why you have no reason to address me in such a way."

"T-That's..."

Compared to Suzutsuki and her relaxed expression, Konoe looked like her world had ended in front of her eyes. Hey now, isn't that taking things too far? I know how much Konoe clings to the fact that she is Suzutsuki's butler. Yet, her own master just denied that. I feel like she's trying to shake her up before the real battle begins.

“Don’t get the wrong idea.” However, Suzutsuki brushed away this unpleasant atmosphere herself. “That doesn’t mean I don’t want you to stay as my butler.”

“...Eh?”

“I’m saying that this only counts for as long as you stay in this house. As long as you live here, we are rivals. That’s why, it wouldn’t feel right for you to address me in such a way.”

“...T-Then, what should I call you...” Konoe was bewildered.

Suzutsuki let out a blatantly annoyed sigh.

“What an idiot you are. If we’re rivals, then just call me ‘Kana-chan’, hm?” She announced, like that was the obvious conclusion all along.

“H-However, young la—”

“Kana-chan.”

“...! K-Kana-chan, that’s just...”

“What problem do you have with this? We’re enemies, it’d be weird to address me as young lady.”

“Indeed, but...”

“And, drop the polite language, we’re not at home right now. Don’t you agree, Subaru?”

“.....” Konoe grew silent for a moment.

“...Alright. This is what you want right, Kana-chan.” Slightly flustered, she obliged.

“Fufu, thanks. Then, how about we get this competition started. Let’s go all out, Subaru.”

“—Yeah, you’re right, Kana-chan.”



The butler and maid looked at each other. Despite them going to battle soon enough, they looked like they were having fun...Well, in the end, Suzutsuki Kanade can't be honest with herself either. I bet that, deep down, she just wanted to have fun with her own butler and friends. Realizing how twisted of a person she was, I shook my head, and let out a sigh.

“The very first whacko competition! Butler vs Maid! A championship for the title of our family’s servant!”

With Kureha’s announcement that sounded like it came out of a TV game show, this odd competition began. The rules are simple. Basically, these two have to convince me and Kureha that they are more worthy of being our servants than the other. The way of appealing to us is left open to them. In reality, this feels like some auditioning for an idol group, but we never had a precedent of a butler versus maid battle. Never would I have imagined that I’d be experiencing the birth of such an odd competition in my own home.

“Then, for the first battle, I’ll start. Fufu, just come at me however you want. You won’t be able to entice this Sakamachi Kureha that easily!”

Kureha sounded like she just stepped into the ring. Ahh, my little sister really is a special case. Oh yeah, she always loved words like battle, competition, and contest, right.

“Then, I’ll be the first.” Konoe took a step forward.

By the way, as long as it’s inside the house, everything is allowed. Except violence, of course. Can’t have a death match happening in our own house.

“K-Konoe-senpai right off the bat...” Kureha was clearly flustered.

Where’d all that excitement from before go, huh? Hmm, will this even be a proper contest? As long as she doesn’t do anything weird, Kureha will definitely give Konoe her vote...Gathering all the gazes around, Konoe alone walked to the kitchen. I guess she’s planning on using some tool after all. When she came back, in her hand she had—an apple.

Must be a left-over from this morning’s breakfast. She had cut it beautifully into eight pieces, and had put on a tray she carried like a waitress at a cafe.

“My lady.” Konoe picked up a piece of apple with a fork, and offered it to Kureha. “Here, open wide.” She smiled with the warmth of a



gentle summer morning sun.

“.....”

Crap. For a second, I was totally entranced by her. I tend to forget, but at school, she is the prince. If she approached me with a smile like that, and asked ‘Please pay all my debts for me!’, I don’t have the confidence to decline. I doubt most of humanity could shake their heads there. Naturally, when met with such a perfect customer smile, my little sister’s reaction was about what you could expect...

“Hawa...hawawawa.” She was blushing furiously, as eating the apple took everything from her.

Naturally, the winner had already been decided. Didn’t even need to think about it. Seriously, what an instant K.O. Konoe conquered Kureha in a moment’s notice. Kureha’s face was an absolute mess, as she tried her best to gulp down the apple. It genuinely looks like she’s weakened with poison or something.

Either way, Konoe now possesses a massive lead...Not to mention after a single battle. How will Suzutsuki fight back—

“I guess it’s my turn now.” The maid walked towards Kureha, with her dress swaying left and right.

...Are you serious? She doesn’t falter after seeing Konoe’s overwhelming approach? That’s just eerie at that point. In fact, it almost seems like this is going according to her own plan.

“Hey, Kureha-chan.” With a somewhat betwitching tone, she called out to Kureha. “There is something I’d like to bring in the room I borrowed from you, but it’s a bit too heavy to carry for me alone. Would you mind helping me?”

“...? Sure, I don’t mind.”

“Great, let’s go.”

Suzutsuki received Kureha’s graciousness, and they headed up to the second floor. What’s going on? The room she’s talking about...is Mom’s room, right? Was there something big in there? I can only

think of the 200kg dumbbells, but what good would those do? I bet she can't even raise those for sure.

"Phew, seems like this is my victory." The butler next to me let out a sigh. "There's nothing Kana-chan can do about this. When it comes to the battle of being a servant, I have the high ground."

I really want to comment on how her approach just now really wasn't related to being a butler in any case of the word, but I'll stop. More importantly...

"Are you sure about that? I feel like Suzutsuki is plotting something again."

"You sure are a worrywart, Jirou. I told you before, but there's no way I could lose this competition."

If you say so...But, I can't help wondering about that face Suzutsuki showed me. Her expression was confident enough to give chills. It seriously felt like she was sure of her victory.

"Ah, they're back."

At that time, Suzutsuki and Kureha came back to the living room... Hm? They're both empty-handed. Maybe it was too heavy to carry.

"...I need to announce something."

There, Kureha spoke up with somewhat of an emotional voice. What is this, it feels like her eyes are all over the place. And her cheeks are red...It's as if she just got out of a bath.

"This round...is Onee-sama's absolute victory." Like she was announcing the winner of a boxing match, she raised Suzutsuki's hand.

"Wha!?" I found trouble accepting this reality.

Konoe seemed to agree with me there, as she failed to even find any words to say, her mouth opening and closing in shock. In the midst of that, Suzutsuki Kanade nodded with a satisfied expression.

“N-No way! How did that happen!” Konoe finally got a grip, and somehow managed to line up proper words.

Yeah, I get you. I’m confused myself. The only explanation I can think of is that Suzutsuki persuaded Kureha when they were up on the second floor...

“...Kureha? Did Suzutsuki do something to you?”

In order to solve this mystery, I called out to my little sister, who was absolutely beyond herself.

“.....Nii-san...Um...” Hearing my question, Kureha blushed even further. “I...can’t become a bride anymore...”

“Suzutsukiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!” Reflexively, I screamed at the top of my lungs.

“What’s wrong, Jirou-kun? I don’t see a reason for you to scream like that.”

“Don’t give me that crap! What did you do to my little sister!?”

“Put strongly, I gave her a shoulder massage.”

“Why a shoulder massage!?”

“It seemed like she had stiff shoulders ever since she came back from the training camp, so I helped her with that.”

Are you serious? I looked over at Kureha to confirm that, but it was too late. My little sister had collapsed on the sofa...or rather, melted. It was so good that her hips gave in? I can’t even look at her anymore. She looked like ice cream melting on the asphalt in midsummer during the sun’s zenith. Just what did she do to my little sister? No, I bet that shoulder massage was just more nonsense, and she actually did something much worse.

I threw a glare at Suzutsuki’s way. In response, she showed me the tip of her tongue, and flashed a deviant grin...Ahh, so terrifying. I knew this before, but you really can’t underestimate Suzutsuki Kanade.

“Fufu, let’s move on to the next round. This time it’s Jirou-kun’s turn. Since Subaru got to go first just now, I’ll be taking the initiative.”

“.....”

I got chills, seriously. An indescribable cold sensation crept up my back, sending shivers through my body that had me shake in fear. Maybe the old neighbourhood lady that died three years ago is clinging to my back. Either that, or it’s that wolf wench’s fault.

“You don’t need to be so scared of me. Your shoulders don’t seem that stiff to me, and I’ll learn from Subaru instead, using a more direct approach.” She said, and reached for the plate with the apple on it.

Is she planning on doing what Konoe did before? If so, then I need to be careful. Despite wearing a maid uniform, Suzutsuki isn’t embarrassed at all. If I relax for even a second, I’ll end up conscious of her.

“...!?”

However, she went even further beyond what I could have imagined. She took the apple, and cut it even smaller than before using a fork. The pieces reached a size resembling biscuits, and after picking that up, she shoved a piece into her mouth.

“.....” I was unable to follow what exactly I was looking at.

Is this...some darker russian roulette version of the pocky game? Isn’t that pretty bad, then? It’s a piece of an apple, the size of roughly 2cm at most.

“K-Kana-chan! That is taking it too far...!” Konoe screamed with a beet red face.

I should be the one blushing, alright. A direct approach...That really is one, for sure. But, there’s a difference compared to Konoe before. According to our measuring, this is a straight ball coming with a solid 160km/h. It’s like a fast ball coming from Randy Johnson himself.

...You devil, are you that desperate to win!?

“Here, open wide~”

She must have lost her temper because I didn’t act at all, as Suzutsuki had that piece of apple shake up and down. This is bad, my heart will end up like Chernobyl. Is she planning to have me involuntarily drop out of this competition by making my heart explode? I tried my best to keep my racing heart under control, and approached the apple with my lips.

But, I can’t run away. If I dared to run away now, I’d forever be branded as an ultra chicken. That being said, touching Suzutsuki is no good either, I’d probably pass out right away. I feel like I’m trying to defuse a bomb. With the focus like I was about to cut a cord, I approached the apple. Damn it, she’s even closing her eyes...Also, such long eyelashes...Wait, that isn’t the time for me to worry about! Hit & run time.

I heard the sound of the apple breaking, a small piece falling inside my mouth. At the same time, I jumped away from Suzutsuki. Ahh, this is bad for my heart. My head is spinning.

“Next it’s your turn, Subaru.” Suzutsuki had the nerve to say that like nothing had happened.

It’s like you’re Jackie Chan who just walked into a fight.

“Urk...” Konoe grit her teeth.

I can’t blame her. After being shown such a high-speed ball, it’d probably be better for her to just pack up and head home.

“...Not yet. A butler won’t break from something like this!”

“No, just give up.”

“Wha...!?” Konoe swallowed her breath, and glared at me. “What are you saying! My pride as a butler is on the line here!”

“Pride?”

“Think about it! A butler losing against his master in a battle of serving others! What would you think about someone like that!?”

“I’d probably fire them on the spot.”

“See! And the world isn’t as nice as to let me find another job, so I’ll have to visit Hello Work tomorrow!” Konoe screamed, speaking only with realistic arguments.

I mean, I get it, but this competition really isn’t about butlers and maids anymore. It’s more like a game of chicken to see who backs off first.

“This is a battle I definitely cannot lose...” She sounded like some soccer commentator, and reached for the apples on the plate.

Is she trying to copy Suzutsuki? That would be quite destructive, but she won’t be able to win by doing the same thing...

“...Mgh.”

However, I had not expected her to stuff the slice of apple directly into her mouth. She filled her cheeks with more pieces, until she looked like a squirrel right before winter. What is she doing? Is she hungry? We didn’t even have lunch yet.

“I see, that makes sense.” For some reason, Suzutsuki nodded in acknowledgement. “Jirou-kun, I really think you should mentally prepare yourself.”

“Excuse me? What’s that about? Do you know what she’s planning on doing?”

After a brief silence, Suzutsuki responded.

“Mouth-to-mouth.”

“...Wat?”

“You heard me. She plans to directly feed you mouth-to-mouth with that apple.”

“.....”

Yeah, that can’t be it. Doubtful, I glanced over at Konoe, who finally

finished stuffing her mouth, and directed her gaze at me. Wah, she looks dead serious.

“R-Rethink that decision, Konoe! That’s less of a straight ball, and more of a deadly finisher!”

No, seriously, I can’t catch that ball. Can someone call for the former catcher of the Tokyo Yakult Swallows?

“Isn’t it fine? Not like it’s her first time.”

Right as Konoe and I were practically glaring at each other, Suzutsuki dropped that comment. What? What’s that about?

“...Eh? Did you not hear about it from Subaru? When you almost drowned last month at the leisure land, she—” Suzutsuki spoke that far, only to be stopped mid-sentence.

With a demonic and furious expression, Konoe stuffed a full apple into Suzutsuki’s mouth. What was that? Is that some new way of eating an apple? After Suzutsuki somehow managed to gulp down the apple through rigorous chewing, Konoe glared at me again. Eeek, I guess I shouldn’t be thinking about anything unnecessary.

In response, I wanted to run away from this situation entirely, but Konoe ran towards me like a blood-starved beast, and grabbed my shoulders. Ahhh, she’s not letting me gooo! I’m scared! Her eyes are sparkling like the midsummer sun!

“.....Mm.”

With no words whatsoever, Konoe closed her eyes. However, I could tell that she was tense about this. Her lips were quivering, and she tightly held onto my shoulders. Seriously, what am I supposed to do about this? Because of Suzutsuki’s nonsense just now, I was still feeling chills, with my head hurting. My field of view was still a bit hazy. And even so, I could see Konoe’s outline. As well as her soft-looking flower petal lips. Now, they are approaching me...

“Ah, that reminds me. You best be careful, Subaru.”

With only a few centimeters left between us, Suzutsuki opened her

mouth. I looked over at her, who showed an oddly serious expression. "I'm sure he'll put it in while kissing."

**Pffft!** Konoe spit out all the apple slices in her mouth. Ahhh, the apple! Some pieces shot right into my nose! While holding down my poor nose, I rolled on the floor in agony. At the same time, Konoe was coughing violently.

"K-Kana-chan! Don't just say something weird like that!"

"Weird?"

"A-About putting it in!"

"I mean, I bet he'll put a lot of effort into kissing? What else did you think I was talking about, Subaru?"

".....!" Konoe started blushing to the point I could see steam rising from her head.

Of course, I wasn't any different from her. My face felt incredibly hot. It's like I suffered from a heatstroke. Anyway, thanks to that comment, I was saved. A bit more, and I would have lost my mouth's virginity. I definitely don't want to have my first kiss in such a situation, alright.

"Alright, that concludes the second round. It seems like this is my victory," spoke the maid with a confident tone.

I feel like we've lost the original concept of this competition a while ago, but I don't mind if Suzutsuki wins. Probably because I suffered through two consecutive all-nighters, my body feels incredibly sluggish. Just let this mess end already.

"Anyway, I'm the servant worthy of serving this family. As we agreed, I will have you leave now."

"Urk..."

Because of Suzutsuki's words, Konoe stiffened up. She really does not want to go home, huh. I doubt she's that adamant on not leaving here.



“Hey, why not just go home to your place?”

“Eh...” Konoe raised her face in shock, looking at me. “Why! Why are even you saying that, Jirou!”

“I mean, I don’t know why you wouldn’t want to go back, but it’s some personal reason, right?”

Not to mention that she can’t stay at my place forever. What’s important is a trigger for her to go back, just like this timing right now.

“Or, do you plan on staying here?”

“T-That’s...” Konoe grit her teeth.

“You’re Suzutsuki’s butler, right? That’s why, just hurry on...back to the...residence...”

...Huh? Weird. My mouth isn’t working properly.

“...Jirou?” Konoe gave me a worried gaze.

But, because my field of view was so oddly blurry, I could fully make out her face. The chills just now and the headache I’m feeling are making my body feel numb—and yet, I feel hot. My entire body feels like it’s burning up. Oh man, this is like I have an actual fever—

“Jirou...are you okay?” I heard an anxious voice.

I’m fine—I tried my best to tell her these words, but my consciousness faded out way before that.

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1 All names of popular characters from the Fullmetal Alchemist series

2 The famous island and fighting ground of the battle between Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojirou

3 This whole thing is some obscure reference on an anime called Yatterman



## Chapter 5: Her Reason

Hot—With this sensation, I woke up. In the midst of my hazy view, I recognized a familiar ceiling. It seems like I was sleeping in my own bed up until now. When I gazed over at the clock inside my room, to my surprise, the time had already progressed towards evening. Oh wow, I was actually sleeping for half a day?

“Urk...”

I put on my glasses that were laying right next to my pillow, and tried to raise my upper body. However, immediately after, I realized that my body wasn't fully listening to me. I feel so sluggish. My body felt heavy enough to exhaust me just trying to get up. On top of that, a headache was making my head spin. It's like Mom forced me to drink shōchū again like she did before. I feel like this is a two-days worth of a hangover.

And...I feel cold. Despite the inside of me burning up with fire, I couldn't stop shaking because it felt freezing in my room. What is this feeling? Thinking that something was off, I quickly wanted to cover myself with my blanket, when—

“...!” I swallowed my breath.

Konoe was right next to me. She was still wearing her butler uniform, as she clung to me in her sleep.

“.....”

Um, what is this about? I don't remember buying such an adorable hugging pillow, you know. Or, is that some kind of early Christmas present? Is Santa Claus secretly working in human trafficking or something...

“...Mmm...” Muttering something, Konoe clung to my waist.

She might be mistaking me for some plush toy or whatever. Either way, this is bad. Be it her slender body, with slim arms and legs, or

her feminine outline with a sweet scent drifting upwards from it, she undoubtedly was a girl. If I don't get away from her soon, I'll get a nosebleed again.

“.....”

Ahh, but...she's warm. I guess this is what you call a human's warmth. Even through her clothes, our bodies were touching directly. The warmth coming from this felt calming towards my shivering body. I guess...staying like this for a bit longer wouldn't hurt. As my head was still a mess, I carelessly judged so, and was about to hug her small body like a true hugging pillow, when—

“Nii-san, I'm coming in.”

The door to my room opened.

“K-Kureha!?”

Indeed, it was Sakamachi Kureha. Without even knocking, she entered my room, and saw the two of us on the bed, practically embracing each other.

“Y-You're wrong! I wasn't doing anything! This position was out of my control...!”

All my hazy thoughts cleared up in an instant. What an awful scene for her to walk in. My body woke up quickly enough to realize what a bad situation this was. I tried to push away Konoe, but my sluggish body wouldn't allow me to muster up enough strength. Come on, get away. She'll get the wrong idea...

“Nii-san!” Kureha started acting without a moment's hesitation.

Her small body soared through the air. Immediately after, her body slammed into mine. It's like a Zero fighter plane in the American army. It's like she landed an NFL touchdown.

“Guho!?”

I tried to accept her body, but my body full of lead couldn't react in time, so Kureha basically slammed me back onto the bed. This

normally would be the moment for a tragedy to occur. Indeed, a pro-wrestling move banquet was all-you-can-eat for me. Damn it, if I had at least had my usual strength...However, fear got hold of my body, leading me to freeze up...

“...Idiot...Nii-san, you idiot...”

To my surprise, these words reached my ears.

“Kureha?”

I looked down at her in shock, only to find her head buried in my chest. She was bawling her eyes out. Waaah, what is this now? Is she trying to charge up energy like yesterday? But, she’s crying way too much. She should probably charge herself with some Pokari Sweat drinks instead.

“I was...I was really worried...!” Even during her weeping, she strongly clung to my body.

...This is bad. My little sister crying already is an awful occurrence, but even worse than that is the fact that two girls are clinging to my body right now. I can already feel it stinging in the back of my nose. My gynophobia is activating. I need...I need to get away...

“You’re awake now, huh.” A dignified voice rang out.

Looking over towards the source, Suzutsuki Kanade stood there. She still wore her maid uniform, resting against the doorframe.

“S-Suzutsuki...” I asked for help, reaching out for her with my hand.

Because of my symptoms, my field of view switched on and off like a color timer in Ultraman. At this rate, my soul will go on a honeymoon to heaven hand in hand with death himself.

“.....Ahaha.”

However, as if to betray my expectations, Suzutsuki inspected me like a researcher who wants to experiment with actual human bodies, and showed me an evil grin...Amen. I cursed my own foolishness, and started praying to God despite not even being Christian.

In the midst of my hazy view, I saw that cursed maid who prepared herself for a dive. I was an idiot for asking that rich wench for help. However, I wasn't given much time to regret, because the soft sensation hitting my face had my consciousness sink into a deep slumber.

♀ × ♂

“38.1°C, that's a cold alright.”

After I regained my consciousness, Suzutsuki announced as such while looking down at the thermometer. I see, a cold, huh. Suzutsuki mentioned that a cold was going around right now. And, it seems like my body has fallen victim to this cold. Yay, I wasn't late to a trend for once...Why am I happy about that?

“If I had to guess, you probably weren't living the most healthy life, right? Adding any excessive exercise you're not used to...and lack of proper nutrition, it'll do the trick.”

Oh, I have a few ideas now, actually. It even started when I woke up, with my head hurting beyond belief, and when Konoe and Suzutsuki were having their competition, I felt chills. Thinking about it now, my body was giving out SOS signs all this time.

Damn it, at least tell me in a way that's easy for me to understand. Like in morse code or flag signaling. I would have acted sooner. You agree with me, right? I looked at Suzutsuki to ask for something resembling sympathy, but she just showed me a dubious reaction.

“It seems like you have a fever as well. For now, just go get some sleep. Since it's Golden Week, the hospitals don't see patients, but with a bit of medicine, you should survive this.” Suzutsuki said, and put a thin cooling sheet on my forehead.

Somehow, this feels off. Is this the first time she's actually kind to me? Is the world going to end tomorrow?

“You hurry and get better soon. It's no fun bullying you when you're this weak.”

“You damn sadist!”

“Why aren’t you a bit more thankful? You collapsed and left it all to us. Kureha-chan got all pale, screaming ‘What should we do, Nii-san is going to die!’ and started crying.”

“...She’s overreacting again...”

She was crying here just a second ago as well. Talking about Konoe, she’s in Kureha’s room right now.

“Oh yeah, why was Konoe sleeping in my bed?”

“Who knows? If I had to guess, she probably was nervous? I took care of you together with her. You were shaking even in your sleep, right?”

It sounded like absolute nonsense, but I don’t think she would be lying about that. Not to mention that I really am quivering even now. The chills just won’t stop.

“Right. How did that competition end?”

If my memories served me correctly, then I must have passed out before we reached the conclusion. Well, I can guess as much, since Konoe is still here.

“No conclusion. Everything turned chaotic because you collapsed... And the situation took a turn for the worse.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Subaru. She can’t leave people close to her alone, especially when we’re talking about sick people.”

“What’s that about? What does it matter? You’re talking about her nursing me, right?”

“That is one part of it, but...Well, eventually you’ll understand.”

“.....”

Come on, don’t leave me hanging like this. I wanted to ask what she was talking about, but the door opened right at that moment. Talking

about the devil, Konoe entered the room, while carrying a pot.

“Since Subaru’s here, I’ll be taking my leave. Bye bye, Jirou-kun. Don’t die on me, okay.” Suzutsuki stepped out of the room.

Why’d she add that last part? Normally you’d say ‘Take care’, right. Am I some soldier about to head to war?

“How are you feeling?” Konoe asked with a worried gaze.

“I’m still feeling a bit hot, but it’s a lot better. Also, it’s just a cold, remember? You don’t need to be so worr—” I said, only to stop myself mid-sentence.

After all, Konoe gave me a really harsh glare.

“...Jirou, you can’t underestimate a cold. You won’t recover with that kind of mentality.”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right. Sorry.”

For some reason, I found myself apologizing. I couldn’t stand the pressure. Not to mention that Konoe sounded awfully serious when saying that.

“Also...I’m sorry about what happened before. I just snuck into your bed...”

“Don’t worry about it. And sorry, you were nursing me, right?”

“Eh...A-Ah, yeah, of course. Right now, I’m your butler after all, so I need to look after my master.”

“...Yeah, you’re right.”

That damn Suzutsuki, what are you talking about? If I had a butler nurse me back to health like this, I’d gladly catch a cold.

“So...I actually made some food for you, Jirou. Do you have an appetite?”

“I’m fine, but...Wait, food? You cooked?”



I totally thought Kureha or Suzutsuki made it. But, looking at Konoe's fingers, I could see band-aids everywhere.

"It was a bit of trouble, but you should be able to eat it...Would you?"

"—Yeah, of course."

How could I decline? She tried her best to make food for me, despite having this much trouble...and having a fear of knives. I accepted the pot, and thought. Since she used a pot we had here, it must be rice porridge...or rice gruel. Either way, it's stuff easy to digest, and I'm thankful for that. Filled with expectations, I opened the lid, and—

"...!" I swallowed my breath.

It was red, crimson red. It was like a red hell. A mysterious substance X was filling the pot.

"....."

K-Kimchi stew? I think we still had some left over in the fridge, but... I can't even see any pieces in there...

"Here, open wide." Konoe scooped up some of...that...and carried it to my mouth.

...Alright, this isn't so bad. I've lived through Kureha's hellish eating routines, so I won't die this easily.



“T-Thanks for the food.” I tried my best to not catch a whiff of that mess in the pot, and gulped down on it. “...Gueh!?”

Ahhh, spicy! What is this! My tongue! This isn’t normal kimchi anymore! What did she put in there!? I feel like I’m eating at an Indonesian restaurant right now!

“How is it?”

“Y-Yeah, it’s not bad. A bit spicy, maybe...”

However, I wouldn’t be worthy of being called a man if I complained about a girl’s cooking. My nose won’t stop running, and my eyes are tearing up. I feel like going to a field hospital would be a better choice.

“I see! I was worried about putting too much spice into rice porridge, but...I’m glad you like it!”

Ahaha, that’s crazy. This is supposed to be rice porridge? I feel like this definitely will not help my digestion. I’d rather get medicine for my stomach than my cold now.

“Eat as much as you want. I still have lots.”

“Y-Yay, I love it...”

I can’t run away. I definitely can’t run away. Rather than a normal dish, this feels like training or mortification, but when I see that smile of hers, I can’t betray her expectations. Urk, if only I could get some water...

“P-Please...can you get me some water.”

“No can do, Jirou. You won’t be able to become a proper food fighter if you immediately ask for water.”

“I neither need nor want to become one! Just give me water!”

“Hmpf, then you can have some after you finish eating all of this.”

“Y-You better...”

I stole the spoon from Konoe, and stuffed my cheeks with the contents of the pot. Ahhh, my tongue is going numb. I can’t even feel the inside of my mouth anymore. It’s like I went on a trip to the dentist, and got my wisdom teeth pulled.

I somehow managed to eat up everything, and accepted the cup of water from Konoe, gulping it down aggressively.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it. I heard that it’s better for you to sweat a lot when you have a cold, so I put lots of spice into it.”

Ahh, that’s why. You’re right, I really can’t stop sweating. Not to mention that my headache and chills got worse as well. I feel like my symptoms have gotten worse.

“Now that you finished eating, you should be getting some more sleep. Getting rest is most important.”

“...Yeah, you’re right. I agree.” I let out a sigh, and snuggled deeper into my bed.

For now, I’ll just catch some sleep. I don’t want to think about it, but there’s a chance I might have to suffer through that same dish for breakfast. I need all the endurance and energy I can get.

“It must be lonely sleeping all on your own, so I’ll stay with you until you fall asleep.” Konoe grabbed a chair and sat down next to my bed.

Hmm, this is pretty embarrassing. It’s not like I’m on my deathbed or anything.

“I even brought some special goods with me that should help you fall asleep faster. They’ve been passed down in my family for generations.”

“Oh really now...”

I feel like I can fall asleep just fine even without you using that...It’s like I’ve overcome a huge obstacle or battle, I’m super sleepy right now. See, I can already feel my consciousness drifting away just by narrowing my eyes.

Konoe took out what looked like a black lump of plastic out of her chest pocket. The heck is that? Since she talked about goods for sound sleep, I figured she was talking about some pillows or whatever, but...weird, it oddly looks similar to a stun gun...

“Rest assured. You’ll be out cold with a single zap.”

**Click**, I heard the sound of a switch being flipped. Right after, I saw a

blue flash come out of the tip of that murder weapon. Without hesitation, I jumped up from my bed.

“Huh? What’s wrong, Jirou. Why’d you protect yourself with that lid?”

“Shut yer trap! You put that thing down! What do you mean sleeping goods!? That’s a stun gun!”

“No need to be scared. It’s adjusted so that two seconds will do the trick.”

“I’ll die! If you hit me with that, I will greet my maker!”

“Hmpf, why would you say that? These are a butler’s sleeping tools.”

“I don’t see any relation to you being a butler!”

She’s crazy. I highly doubt she’s using that method on Suzutsuki. Is she actually plotting to kill me and hide it with my cold?

“It’s fine, you don’t need to use that. I’ll fall asleep by myself just fine.”

“Urk...Really? If you say that, then I won’t force it, but...” Albeit hesitant, she put the stun gun away.

That being said, because of this chaos, all my sleepiness pretty much vanished in an instant. On top of that, my stomach feels awfully hot. Must be because of that rice porridge. Sweating all the bacteria out is one thing, but I’m feeling like I’m inside a sauna.

“Jirou, you’re sweating a lot. Should I wipe you dry?” Konoe’s eyes light up with excitement.

...Crap. Reflexively, I tried to run, but it was too late. Without a moment’s notice, my right arm was grabbed, and I was robbed of my freedom. Looking over, I spotted handcuffs. They’re the same kind I already got to know before, connected between my wrist and the pillar of the bed, as they shone in a silver light.

“You can’t move. If you don’t get any rest, you won’t recover.”

Awful memories from my childhood filled my mind. When I ran away from my planned vaccines, the nurses acted like we were playing rugby as they pushed me down. But, I was probably better off back then. Right now, I feel like a sacrifice for some cult worshipping an evil god, or a guinea pig for her cooking.

“U-Um, Konoe-san...?” I tried to force out a quivering voice, looking at Konoe.

She gave me a gentle face, like she was talking with a child, and...

“Now, let’s take off those clothes, shall we.”

To me, it sounded like a declaration of death penalty. Let me take back my previous statement. I’m not a guinea pig, I’m a dress-up doll.

“W-Wait a second! I can take off my clothes myself!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You can’t use that one arm.”

“Because you put those handcuffs on me!”

“No need to hold back. This is also a part of my duty as a butler.”

“Again with the butler nonsense...Ah, hey! Why are you even trying to take off my underwear!”

“...Don’t blame me, I don’t want to go that far myself, but this is all for you to get over that cold of yours.”

“Nooooo! Stoop! I’ll take off my underwear myseeelf!” My shriek ran through the house.

More and more of my clothes flew through the air. Right when that devilish hand reached my last defence line—I remembered Suzutuski’s words.

...Killed. At this rate, I’ll be killed by my butler.

♀ × ♂

“See, I told you.” After Konoe finally left the room, Suzutsuki took her

place, and spoke up with a sigh. “I bet she’s probably doing this purely out of good will and intentions, but she’s going around in circles. Because of that, I went from a normal cold to pneumonia before.”

...Why did you not tell me about that sooner? Thanks to that, I was about to end up butt naked in front of a classmate.

“Don’t give me such a resentful gaze, will you. I brought something with me to brighten your mood.” She took out a single apple from her maid dress’ pocket.

That’s all? Not even cut? You’re lucky I’m too exhausted to even complain. I accepted the apple, and took a bit from it. Ahh, so juicy and delicious. I’m sorry that I always complained about you, apples. I’ll learn to appreciate you from now on. While munching on my apple, I heard an electronic beeping sound.

The thermometer beneath my armpit was the source for this, signaling that it finished measuring my temperature. Let me see... Wah, are you serious?

“38.6°C? Amazing, it’s gone up.”

“Makes sense why my head felt like it was spinning...”

“Ah, have you finally realized the charm of the maid standing in front of you?” She raised the skirt she was wearing to the absolute limit, striking quite the bewitching posture.

I don’t even have the energy to throw a retort or joke at her. Just breathing was starting to become too heavy for me. And no, it’s not that I was breathing heavily because of the garter belt I could see on her thighs, okay.

“Are you okay? Should I call for Subaru?”

“Please don’t. You might as well call for a hearse while you’re at it.”

“I see. Then, would you prefer the police instead?”

“Why!?”

“I mean, you were entranced by my garter belt, thinking ‘I want to get squished between there so baaaadly!’, right?”

“Slander! I most definitely wasn’t going that far!”

“Then, what were you thinking?”

“Urk...M-More importantly! Can’t you do something about this? You’re her master, right!”

In order to avoid criminal prosecution, I switched the topic at hand. I don’t have time to play along with her pranks. And, I need to avoid talking about that garter belt for good...

“No can do. As long as we’re staying here, Subaru and I are enemies. Since that rule is still active, I can’t give her any orders.”

“So cruel...”

“Why not give in and be freed from this?”

“Don’t jinx this!”

“I’ll make sure to properly burn your body and serve you as roast chicken.”

“Are you planning some Christmas party or something!?”

“Thanks for the food.”

“Me being eaten is the premise!?”

“Ah, I’m sorry. My mistake. My condolences.”

“You’re not wrong, but also not right either!”

As I screamed, Suzutsuki clapped her hands together. Can you seriously drop it, you’re terrifying me. At this rate, my cold will only get worse. Save me, Black Ja\*k<sup>1</sup>-sensei.

“You act like this, but you have a definite fault in this situation as well.”



“What are you on about?”

I mean, I was the one who caught the cold, so I get what you’re putting out, but...I don’t feel like I did anything that would make Konoe go crazy like that.

“Listen, the reason Subaru is so dead-set on taking care of people when they’re sick is because of her mother, who passed away on a sickbed.” Suzutsuki carefully explained. “She died ten years ago. This might just be my personal opinion, but normally you would try to forget such awful memories. However, in Subaru’s case, it’s the opposite. She’s trying her hardest to not forget her mother, and is subconsciously glorifying those memories.”

“Glorifying?”

“Yes, by quite a bit as well. That’s why, the older she gets, the more these memories she has will start to become more beautiful and alluring.”

Of course, the same goes for the feelings she had when she lost her mother—Suzutsuki added, and continued.

“That’s why she can’t leave you alone no matter what. She can’t help but compare you to her mother, as you’re lying sick in your bed.”

“.....”

That’s the reason Konoe is working this hard. I feel like she’s taking things too far though. I’m not terminally ill or something.

“But, what does that reason have to do with me?”

“It’s simple. Jirou-kun, you told Subaru some nonsense about your father being on a business trip, right.”

“Urk.”

“I knew it. Something was off. When you collapsed, Subaru’s face lost all color.”

“That bad?”

She saw me collapse? But, why would she figure out that I was lying?

“I told you just now. When you collapsed, Kureha-chan was panicking. And, she actually screamed the following. ‘What should I do, Nii-san is going to die **as well!**’.”

“...!”

Damn it, what a blunder. To think it had to be such an awful pattern for Konoe to find out.

“I asked Kureha-chan about this before, but your father died because of an illness as well, right. That’s why it must have been quite a shock for Kureha-chan, don’t you think? Seeing a family member collapse like that.”

“.....”

She’s not wrong. However, more than quite, it probably was a huge shock. Possibly because of Mom’s spartanic training, never Kureha nor I often caught colds like this. That’s why she’s not used to it. She has no resistance towards the fact that a family member can catch a cold and simply recover from it. This is the first situation where I collapsed because of a cold, and not because I couldn’t withstand a wrestling technique.

However, now it happened. And, she was reminded, she suffered a flashback. I’m sure her memories must be hazy, but our old man often collapsed because of his weak condition. I bet that, in Kureha’s eyes, I must have looked exactly like our old man. And, worst of all...

“Subaru found out that you were talking nonsense. At the worst possible timing, not to mention. And, there’s one more thing that makes this worse.”

With no warning at all, Suzutsuki reached for the glasses on my face, and took them off.

“Jirou-kun, without your glasses, **you look exactly like your father, right.**”

“!”

I see. Since Kureha generally has more of Mom's blood, I resemble my old man a lot more. I even heard my Mom say 'You really look like him in his younger years' when she was drunk. Maybe that's a big reason why Kureha was panicking like that? She mentioned something about me looking like him the older I get, but...how did Suzutsuki and Konoe...

“—Ah, the pictures in the living room.”

These pictures showed me and Kureha when we were still young children. Of course, Mom and my old man were there as well. I know it might sound weird coming from me, but my old man in those pictures...looked awfully like me. Or rather, I'm starting to look like him.

Anyway, Konoe must have realized that, and gotten the wrong idea. Namely, that I have the same weak and fragile body that my old man has.

“Of course, Subaru understands that you are different from your father. Kureha-chan explained that to her. But, knowing it and being able to accept it is different. Thinking that you might just die, like your father did—like her mother did.

“.....!”

That is the truth, and the reason why Konoe is that desperate when it comes to nursing me back to health.

“The problem is that Subaru goes beyond the point of simply nursing, and creates the opposite effect. You've experienced it yourself, haven't you.”

I am indeed very much experienced, yes. Suzutsuki must have been reminded of this experience herself, as she shuddered.

“Using a stun gun and calling it sleeping tools, stripping off my clothes to wipe off my sweat, calling it medicine but feeding me some weird grass, saying that it'll fix my fever, so she'll use...use onions...!”

“H-Hey, calm down, Suzutsuki. I get it, I get how much you must

have gone through, so don't force yourself."

She must have been reminded of her past trauma, as Suzutsuki started shivering. The later half even I hadn't experienced. What did she do with the onions? Well, that's a problem for the me of tomorrow. I won't be able to sleep otherwise.

"By the way, the worse your condition gets, the more Subaru's nursing escalates. Through that, your condition worsens again. This continues and on and...Fufu, It's amazing, right? Such a vicious circle."

"Don't laugh, it's definitely not funny."

It's an awful downward spiral. I've experienced that plenty today, so just thinking that it could get even worse gives me the shiffers.

"So then, do your best, will you. While you're being nursed back to health, Kureha-chan and I will be having fun with Kojirou."

"H-Hold on a second!" I desperately reached out to her skirt as she left the room.

"Lewd. You want me to take off my skirt that badly?"

"Don't be stupid! You'd lose your identity as a maid if you took off your skirt."

"Your fever has gone up again, I see. Or, are those your honest feelings, I wonder." Suzutsuki showed an awfully complicated expression.

"I'm not joking around. Please, save me. If she continues to attack me like this, I won't be able to do anything. You should know what I'm going through, right?"

I think Suzutsuki even ended up with pneumonia after all. I might actually end up hospitalized...if they were open.

"Mmm...but..."

"What, is there a reason you can't help me?"

“The thing is, Kojirou just learned ‘Paw’. At this rate, we might even make it to ‘Amazing Ani\*als!2’, you know.

“Like hell this is the time to be proud about your dog’s education. Not to mention that show isn’t even running anymore.”

“...Eh? You’re kidding, that divine show...”

“Why is that so much of a shock?”

Did she like it that much? I mean, it was pretty popular when it was running...

“I mean, it’s cute.”

“Well, watching cute animals is fun.”

“Makes me want to hug Mino\*onta.”

“That’s what you meant!?”

“I recorded every single episode of Asa\*ba3.”

“Even though that’s running every morning?!”

“Ahh, Mino\*onta is so adorable.”

“Stop it! You’re ruining my image of you!”

“Don’t worry, you’re just as cute, Jirou-kun. You’re definitely not losing.”

“You’re not making me happy even if you say that now!” After screaming, I burst out in a coughing fit.

How could this happen, now even my throat hurts. My body is getting more and more sick.

“Well, leaving aside the jokes.” Suzutsuki let out a snicker. “Let’s do a Give & Take. If you want me to save you, could you assist me in something?”

“Assist you?”

“That’s right. Think about the reason why I came to his house.”

“.....”

The reason she came here...was to play with her butler...No, not that. The only reason a rich lady like her would come to such a shabby place...

“...You want to take back Konoe, right.”

“Indeed, that’s the gist of it. But, what is Subaru’s motivation to nurse you back to health like she is attempting to?”

“That’s...because she’s my butler.”

“That’s right. Subaru is your butler, and you are Subaru’s master. That is the ultimate reason why Subaru has to care for you. Then, you can just destroy this entire relationship as a whole.”

“!”

I see. Then, she won’t have to nurse me anymore. Because that’s outside the range of her duties.

“Basically, if I can make Konoe go back to your place...”

“She’ll stop being your butler. Once she’s back at our residence, she will be busy with work, and won’t be able to nurse you back to health. Do you understand what I’m asking for, dear master?” She grinned, showing the perfect smile of a servant.

“.....”

...I see. What a reliable maid you are, Suzutsuki. You’re the best.

“But, how can we make her go back? Another butler vs maid competition?”

“Not quite. For now, let’s go.” Suzutsuki offered me a jacket she took out of her corset.

“Hey, where are we going?” I asked, while putting on the jacket.

It's currently 5pm in the evening, and it's starting to get dark outside.

"Isn't that obvious? We're going to visit the reason why Subaru came to this place."

"The reason?"

"Indeed. I never explained, did I. Subaru begged me not to tell you, but this situation won't improve otherwise." Suzutsuki continued with a heavy atmosphere. "The reason—is a family quarrel."

"Family quarrel?"

So...she's having a fight with that old fart?

"Konoe Nagare, you already met him once. They got into a fight, which is why Subaru left. That's why, as long as these two make up, everything will be resolved. So now, let's go meet him—Konoe Nagare." She announced with no hesitation, as her apron dress fluttered.

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1 A Japanese manga (?) series about a doctor

2 A TV show

3 AsaZuba, with its host Minomonta





# Chapter 6: Baby Please Go Home

Of course, we can't have her walk around outside wearing an apron dress like that. Hence, Suzutsuki changed into her private clothes. She wore clothes with a large ribbon, and a long skirt below. For some reason, it seemed like she hated the idea of wearing that...

"I mean, going outside with maid clothing would have been a fresh feeling, right?"

"...Please, don't. I don't even want to imagine the misunderstanding people would have."

You see a man walking around in the evening with a maid at this side. I'd be called a pervert, and probably arrested.

"Why are you this scared? You can just explain yourself even if someone saw us."

"Meaning?"

"Something like 'What problem do you have! I just put clothes on my dog and am taking it out on a walk!', you know."

"That's even worse!"

"By the way, I'll be screaming 'Save me! If I don't obey him, my family will be killed!'."

"You traitor! You only want to save yourself!"

"So this is what it means to bite the hand that feeds you."

"You're not biting me, you're ruining my life!"

"Gabu."

"You actually bit meeeee!?"

Not to mention that she bit my ear. I was out of breath. Damn it, to think my body would be unable to retort properly. My legs were shaking even, making it tough to walk.

“...Also, where are we even going?” I asked, while looking down the dimly-lit path ahead of us.

We found ourselves on a bank going along with the large river that cut across our town. We’ve been walking on the asphalt path above it for about ten minutes now. I don’t remember their residence being this way if we’re actually going to meet that old man. Adding the ambient noise of the highway and the river, it’s hard to even have a proper conversation.

“You’ll understand it soon enough. More importantly, Subaru didn’t see us leaving, right?”

“No worries there. We escaped through the window of my room, so she won’t catch on this quickly.”

It’s been a while since I left through my room’s window. By the way, I went for a cool superhero landing, but because I was still feeling dizzy, I totally failed.

“That’s reassuring to know. Subaru will definitely get angry when she realizes that you snuck out. If she finds us here, she’ll lock you up in your room.”

That may be the case, but why is she smiling while saying that? I don’t think there’s anything funny here. She really is a sadist.

“Why would you even need my help? Isn’t it Konoe and her old man who are having a fight?”

“.....” Suzutsuki briefly averted her gaze, like she was feeling awkward about it. “Of course I need your help. After all, this quarrel happened because of you.”

“Wha?”

What’s up with that? What did I do? I didn’t do anything, right?

“Last month, that incident at the leisure land happened, remember. When Nagare beat you to a pulp.”

“Yes, I still vividly remember. I was fighting that old man who acted as a kidnapper...Wait, don't tell me.”

“Yes, exactly. After that incident, Subaru's been in some sort of cold war with her father. This finally exploded, and they had a serious quarrel. Basically, everything that happened this Golden Week is the result of that incident in April.”

“.....”

Hey now, are you kidding me. My injuries are all better, and I'm not even that angry towards that old fart anymore, and yet...she's been fighting with her own father for my sake?

“You should know that both Subaru and Nagare are stubborn. This family quarrel is getting close to an all-out war.”

“All-out war...”

“That's right. A great storm of a war that swallowed up everything around it...” Suzutsuki let out a deep sigh. “To think that even the entire Suzutsuki Family would be dragged into that pie throwing contest.”

“.....”

A pie throwing contest? I thought they destroyed the entire residence or something.

“Yes, it was absolute hell. They destroyed half the building during that contest...”

“...And yet you sound like you had fun.”

What kind of pie throwing contest was that? I might have actually wanted to see that live.

“However, it must have been a big shock for Subaru to see a friend from school beaten up like that. In reality, we didn't plan to go that

far either, and Nagare just went with the flow...”

Hm, what’s that rare complicated expression for? Maybe she feels a bit guilty as the person who planned that entire incident...Alright, now that it’s come to this, I’ll have those two make up. Being the reason for this family quarrel doesn’t let me rest easy. Once that’s done, I’ll be getting rid of this cold and enjoy the rest of my Golden Week.

It’ll be a game-turning home run. Even Kureha wouldn’t go too far when I’m still sick. I don’t have much time left until the end of Golden Week, but this is my first and also final chance to get it back.

“We’re here. This is where Nagare is waiting.”

“Alright, then let’s hurry and...”

...Wait a second. Here? Really? After all...this is a bridge. I forgot its name, but it’s a pretty long bridge of like 50 meters crossing the river. Doesn’t look like some house in the residential area...

“Over here.”

Eh, over here? That’s beneath the bridge. Someone’s living here? In this darkness? In the corner stood an unfitting cardboard box. Sitting in the center of that was—

“Wah?”

I couldn’t suppress a shocked voice. Possessing a large and slender stature, he wore tight pants. I could make out a similar butler uniform like Konoe’s, but it was in tatters, and dirty. On top of that, his hair was a ruffled mess, with silver-lined glasses on his face. On his chin, I could see an untrimmed 5-o’clock shadow.

“...Kanade-ojousama?” A familiar husky voice reached my ears.

The shadow saw Suzutsuki standing next to me, and got up. That’s right, I’m looking at Konoe Nagare, Konoe’s father, who had apparently been living beneath a bridge inside a cardboard box.



♀ × ♂

“Hmpf. Just when I was wondering who that dirty glasses bastard next to you was, it’s that shitty brat.” The old fart finally noticed me, and clicked his tongue.

You have the guts to call me dirty!?—I wanted to retort, but I let that sink for now.

“Why are you here...”

His impression completely changed compared to before. I remember him as a dignified and confident butler.

“I felt like experiencing the life of a commoner for once. Been living the survival life for the past two days.”

“Stop lying. Only a small portion of commoners actually live such a life...”

...Huh? Two days ago...isn't that the day Subaru was kicked out of the residence? So...he was as well?

“Nagare was forced to take responsibility as a participant of the quarrel, and was thrown out. It caused a big ruckus after all, and made my father furious.” Suzutsuki calmly explained.

When she says father, she's talking about the head of the Suzutsuki Family, right. In a quarrel, both parties are to blame, as they say. I guess that judgement was correct.

“Well, rather than being angry, I feel like he was just enjoying himself.”

“What an odd father you have.”

This old man was supposed to be the butler of Suzutsuki's father. Being chased out of the place you stay at just for the laughs sounds a bit too cruel if you ask me.

“He did say they were both allowed to come back after they made up. Yet, neither of them could stop being stubborn. That's why we're at this stalemate.”

“Sounds like you've been through a lot, huh.”

If it was me, I would stay out of this idiotic quarrel by any means. Well, I guess I'm already involved beyond that point. Should have gotten some disaster insurance.

“Huh, so you even had human emotions like sympathy within you.

Then, why don't you go die right now? My family was ruined because of you."

"Don't exaggerate to push the blame on me."

"It's the truth. As of late, Subaru won't even call me 'Papa' anymore, and when I ask for a good morning kiss, I get the frying pan slammed into my face. Whose fault could this be if not for yours?"

"I feel like the problem is more with your way of approaching Konoe!"

I can totally see the cracks and fissures way before I entered the frame. I don't want to meddle with other peoples' family businesses, but you're clearly just annoying her at this point.

"What? Are you saying that my direction of education is flawed?"

"Old man, she hit you with a frying pan."

"Heh, this is how communication works in our family."

"What a messed up relationship you have."

Not like I could laugh about it. In my family, there's people flying instead of frying pans.

"Hm, what do you understand? Worst of all is being ignored."

"....."

"Ever since that incident last month, Subaru has been ignoring me without saying anything. Uu...even though she was such a good child...To think she would stray from the right path like that..." The old man wiped his tears.

Looks like he's suffering from a terminal illness. As I thought, he really is a helicopter parent. Thinking about it, he didn't even tell his own master about the fact that I learned of Konoe's secret. He must be covering for her, just like Suzutsuki does. Caring for his daughter isn't a bad thing for sure, but...

“Can’t you just make up already? You don’t want to stay here forever, do you. Would you like me to make an appointment at the child consultation center?”

“Urk...H-However...”

“It’s fine, I brought the victim of the case, Jirou-kun, with me. If he were to forgive you, the aggressor, then Subaru will surely calm down.”

Ahh, that’s what this is about. I get why she needs my help now.

“Urk...I want to make up with Subaru, but...apologizing to this shitty brat is also...”

“...Come on now. I don’t want to forgive you either, but it’s all so that Konoe leaves my place and goes home. I’ll help you out with that.”

That’s right, the most important goal right now is for Subaru to go home. If she stays at my place any longer, I’ll end up in the ICU. For that, I tried to convince that old man, but...

“—Hold on, shitty brat.” Suddenly, the old man’s tone of voice changed. “What do you mean by ‘leaves my place’, hm? I-Is Subaru... is my daughter currently staying at your home?”

“...Ah.”

Crap, he didn’t know where Konoe went. I bet Suzutsuki didn’t tell him either. No way he’d stay quiet otherwise.

“Y-You shitty braaaaaat!”

As expected, he glared at me with the blood-shot eyes of a beast, and leaped at me.

“Y-You bastard! What did you do to my daughter!?”

“Y-You idiot! I didn’t do anything!”

“Stop lying! You have such an adorable girl with you, and you won’t



do anything!? Such a chicken bastard doesn't exist in this world!"

"Sorry for being a chicken, you damn old fart!" I grabbed the old man's wrist, but it was too late.

His fingers already reached my neck.

"I'll kill you! The demon who laid his hands on my daughter deserves to die a million gruesome deaths!"

Jesus christ, this old man is serious. He wants to wring the life out of me.

"...!" I barely managed to put strength into my fingers.

...Damn it, normally I'd be able to intercept this, but with the cold weighing me down...My consciousness is getting more and more hazy. At this rate, he might actually strangle me to death.

"Get away from Jirou!"

I heard a familiar alto voice. Immediately after, my body felt much lighter. It was a beautiful rider kick which kicked the old man away from me.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" Konoe Subaru asked me with her translucent eyes.

She wore the black and white butler uniform I was used to seeing on her.

"K-Konoe, why are you..." I asked, while trying to control my coughing fit.

Even if she realized that I wasn't in my own room, I don't understand how she could have found us this quickly.

"I figured that this might happen, so I set up a GPS function on your phone, Jirou. With that, I could perfectly track you all the way out here." Konoe explained, and grabbed my arm. "We're going home. Your fever will get worse at this rate."

“H-Hold on a second, Konoe!” I screamed as she pulled me along.

Going home now would definitely be bad. This is probably our final chance for her and her old man to make up. That’s why I need to tell her...!

“Shut up! Don’t argue back!”

“...!”

...Crap, it seems like me running away without telling her really pissed her off.

“Why did you sneak out!? Do you know that you’re sick right now!?” She scolded me, and pulled on my arm even stronger.

I tried to resist, but couldn’t muster up enough strength to break free. As a result of that, I was taken back to the path next to the bridge, above the bank.

“Wait, Subaru!” A husky voice stopped us.

Turning around, the old man was out of breath, climbing up the bank. Is he trying to convince her in such a hellhole of a place!?

“...Alright.” I’ll leave this to you, old fart.

Everything rests on your shoulders. Be a man, and a dad, and make up with your daughter!

“...No.”

However, Konoe’s voice destroyed all hope I had. And, after taking a deep breath, she screamed.

“I absolutely hate you, Dad!”

**Bang!** The old man froze up like he was hit by lightning. Slowly, his body fell forwards onto the river bank...Friggin weak. Can’t you try a bit harder, old man...

“Let’s go, Jirou.” Konoe pulled on my arm yet again.

...Damn it. Now that it's come to this, I have to be the one doing it. I need to convince her some way...and have her go home.

"—Konoe, this is enough, don't you think?" I calmly called out to her, so as to not anger her in any way. "Just forgive him already. Your old man said he wanted to make up with you."

"....."

"And, I'm already over him beating me to a pulp. My injuries are all healed now, and I don't hate him at all."

"...!" There, Konoe grabbed my arm even more fiercely.

A short silence followed, which Konoe broke herself.

"—No." She announced, convinced. "I'm Jirou's butler. Until your cold is better, I won't go back to the residence." Her voice sounded hurt, like she was about to cry. "Jirou...Why...why did you sneak out of the house? Do you...do you hate the idea of being nursed by me this much?"

"...No, that's not..." I couldn't find the right words.

That's right. No matter what reason or explanation there may be, at the root of it all, she tried her best for me. She just simply wanted to help me during my cold...

"...Sorry. If my nursing only made it worse for you, then I'll apologize. But...I was worried, okay?" With an anxious gaze, she looked at my face. "You might not know, but when you collapsed, Kureha-chan was crying a lot. When I saw that...it reminded me a long time ago, when Mom died. And, I was scared..."

"....."

"That's why...when I realized that you might die as well...when I thought that I yet again would lose someone important to me...it terrified me. I can't help but worry, okay...! Jirou...please, let's go home?" With a voice about to break out in tears, she begged me.

Ahh, I see. She wasn't exaggerating or anything. She really thought I

might die from this, scared to bone. That's why she was putting all her attention into nursing me back to health. I can tell how worried about me she is. After all, she's close to breaking out in tears. Of course, I'm happy about that. I really am, but...

“.....”

Am I really fine with this? Konoe is crying because of me. Because I collapsed, because I caught a cold. Because—I'm weak.

“...”

I can't accept this. Didn't I make up my mind at the end of April? Stand By Me. I promised my old man that I would uphold these words, that I would become stronger. So that she won't ever have to cry again. I decided, and yet...Am I really fine with not doing anything? Even though she's suffering this much...can I really just stand here, and let it all happen?

“Nii-san!”

Someone suddenly called out to me, pulling me back to reality. Looking ahead of me, I spotted Kureha. Did she chase after Konoe?

“Thank god...I was really worried when I heard you left...” She let out a relieved sigh.

In her arms, she had Kojirou. She must have been too worried to leave him alone at home, so she took her with him. However...

“Ah, calm down, Kojirou!”

Suddenly, Kojirou started to rampage in Kureha's arms. She tried to calm him down, but her broken arm ended up being fatal. She couldn't properly hold him, to which Kojirou jumped down on the floor. Following that, like he was attracted by something, he immediately ran the opposite of the river, down the bank—

“!”

Crap. The opposite side of the river bank...is a highway.

“Wait! No!” Kureha must have caught on to this, and started chasing after Kojirou, down the bank.

“—You idiot!” I reflexively shook off Konoe’s arm, and chased after her.

I feel like Konoe was screaming something, but I couldn’t properly pick it up. I was too focussed on the highway. In the corner of my view, I saw—a large truck. What awful timing is this...!

“Kojirou!” Kureha finally managed to catch up with Kojirou, and carried his small body in her arms.

And—at that exact same moment, she found herself in the middle of the traffic lane.

“Kureha!” While calling out to her, I grabbed her collar, and pulled her backwards.

At around the same time, a high-pitched car horn ran out through the darkness.

♀ × ♂

When I woke up, I was looking at the sky. Beneath my body, I felt the hard and cold asphalt. Huh? Why was I sleeping here?

“Don’t move! We still don’t know if you hit your head!” I heard Suzutsuki’s voice.

Wow, she actually sounds like she’s panicking. This is the first time I’ve seen Suzutsuki like this. I want to take a video on my phone, even.

“N-No...Nii-san! Nii-san!”

In the corner of my eyes, I saw Kureha...But, why is she crying this much?

“.....”

Ahh, I see. I tried to save her, and was hit by a car. Hmm...I feel like

I made it pretty high into the air. When I turned my eyes, I saw that truck just now, rammed into the bank. The driver must have tried to evade me. I hope they're not hurt...

I heard the weeping of a dog close to my ears. Kojirou, huh. Oh yeah, this is your fault I ended up this way. Just you wait, once I'm home, I'll throw out all your dog food.

"No, what should we do...Blood, so much blood...!"

Kureha, will you shut up. I always end up drenched with blood because you use me as a punching bag for your techniques, so why are you panicking now? Well, at least I know that Kureha is safe. She seems to be unharmed...Thank god. With this, I can sleep in peace. I wonder why. Maybe because I've been working on barely any sleep as of late, I feel like I could get a really good nap now. I bet I'd be asleep for two full days.

Alright, good night everyone...I thought, and closed my eyes.

"Jirou..." I heard a weeping alto voice.

I opened my eyes once again, and spotted Konoe looking down at my face. Large grains of tears ran down her cheeks.

"....."

Hey now, will you stop it? Come on, why...are you crying again?

"Urk...!"

Like I had just lived through radio gymnastics, I took a deep breath. It hurts...It feels like my body is going to slip just by breathing. Must have burst some organs. The inside of my mouth tastes like blood and iron. Damn, this might be the first time in my life where I've actually suffered from this much damage. But...you know, this much can't keep me down on the ground for long.

"...Nii-san?"

When I pushed up my body despite the pain, Kureha let out a dumbfounded voice. Don't you worry, I tried to tell her, but nothing

except fragile groans came out of my throat. Damn, my organs are messed up for real.

“Nii-san! No...You can’t move just yet! You’ll die for real...!”

What are you talking about? Aren’t you always using me as a punching bag? But...this once, I’m actually grateful to you. If you and Mom hadn’t trained me...I probably would not have been able to get up there.

“Ugh...Ah...!” With quivering feet, I managed to achieve solid ground.

Alright, now that I’m standing, I’ll take a nap another time.

“Wait!”

Black hair filled my view. It’s Suzutsuki. She had both her arms opened, standing in front of me. Almost as if she wanted to block off my path.

“Don’t move! Are you even aware in what kind of situation you’re in —”

“...Move.”

Met with my surprisingly cold voice, Suzutsuki let out a baffled ‘Eh?’, and her expression froze up.

“Did you not hear me? I told you to move, Suzutsuki.” I didn’t even bother caring about how she must have felt.

I just used my wounded arms to push her aside, and moved towards. That’s right. Keep walking, me. Even if your legs give out, there’s something you have to do right now. The one thing I can do is...

“...K-Konoe.” I desperately tried to keep my breathing under control, and arrived at my butler, whose face was drenched with tears.

I reached for her cheeks—and wiped away those tears.

“J-Jirou...?” She called out my name, her voice quivering in

uncertainty.

Now, it's time. Sometimes I need to show her that I'm just some chicken. I'd be hella lame at this rate, right? I really...can't make her cry again like this.

"Did...did you see that just now? I must have been blasted into the air, right...?" I somehow managed to line up a cohesive sentence with shaking lips, and forced out a dry laugh.

That alone had my entire body ache. An intense pain assaulted my cells. It feels like I'm being munched to pieces inside a giant beast's mouth. But, not yet. I can't collapse just yet.

"Well, I was dealing with a large truck, so I can't blame my body for ending up in tatters like this. But, even so—" I spoke that far, when I couldn't defeat the urge to cough.

Red liquid splattered on the floor. On top of that, both my legs were shaking. Almost like...I was a lamb that was just born.

"—"

No, this is just fine. Right now, I must resemble a sheep. After all, look how pathetic and in shambles I am. Even worse than some chicken bastard...I must look as weak as a newly-born lamb.

"But...even so, Konoe..." I used all my energy to convey my thoughts.

No matter how strong I may be, how much of a chicken or sheep I may be, there are things I can't give up. I have my own stubbornness, as the weak.

"Listen, Konoe...listen to me...and look..." I glanced at Konoe. "**I'm not dead.**" With clear words, my own lips, I conveyed these feelings to her. "You get it now, right? Probably because I was raised in that hellish family, you won't get rid of me that easily. That's why..." I tried to grin. "I won't die from some illness, alright?"

That's right. I won't die. After all, I got hit by a truck, and yet I'm still standing here. Some weak illness won't wring the life out of me. Like



hell I would die because of that. I sadly wasn't raised that weak to immediately die.

"So please...just go back home, okay? You don't have to worry about me. You don't have to cry either. You don't have to be sad. Just relax, and go to the people who really need you."

"...But, Jirou..." Her expression was still riddled in anxiety.

In an attempt to answer that, I let out a faint laugh. That's right, she's not allowed to cry.

"Ha...haha, don't make such a face. Can't you see that I'm as energetic as an old lady on her Sunday morning shopping trip?"

"....."

"It's fine. I promise, I...won't kick the bucket this easily." I said, and flashed the best possible smile I could manage.

...I just hope this gives her a bit of relief. This is the best I can do right now. I might still be weak, but for her, I can give it my all. This is quite possibly the worst show-off she must have ever seen. But, who cares? Everything is better than making her cry again.

"....."

A silence filled the air. The sky was colored with the approaching night darkness. Konoe seemed to have been pondering on my words, but eventually wiped away her tears, and smiled as bright as she could.

"—Yes. I understand, dear master." She deeply lowered her head.

Farewell, my butler.

These were my final words, before I dove down into the blood-red asphalt in front of me.



# Chapter 7: How to Convey Gratitude

“Really, you’re just a helpless idiot, Jirou.”

After my consciousness returned, these were the first words I heard... More importantly though, where am I?

“In a hospital. After that incident, you were brought here with an ambulance.”

I received a brief explanation on the situation. My surroundings were full with white walls, and the oddly familiar scent of medicine. Ah, this is a hospital room. Just as the voice had stated, I was currently laying in a hospital bed.

“...Ouch.” Feeling pain all over, I couldn’t hold down a groan.

My whole body’s in tatters. When I put on my glasses, I saw bandages all over my body, like I was a mummy of sorts. I might just be able to work part-time at a haunted house at this rate.

“You best be thankful to the young lady. The Suzutsuki main family paid for the medical expenses and hospital fees...as gratitude for stopping the fight between me and my Dad.” The alto voice explained.

When I turned my gaze towards that voice, I saw Konoe sitting on a chair next to my bed. Since she had a basket of fruits with her, she must have come to visit me.

“Hm?”

I couldn’t help but blink in confusion at the unexpected scenery in front of my eyes. Sitting next to Konoe on a similar chair, covered by a blanket, someone was sleeping.

“Don’t cause a ruckus. She just got a break.” Konoe said, and pulled

up the blanket.

It was none other than Suzutsuki Kanade. Surprisingly enough, I was looking at Konoe Subaru's master, who was sleeping like Snow White in her fairytale.

"She must have been tired. After all, she was worried the entire time you were out cold."

"The entire time...What time is it right now?"

"It's roughly 4pm. Look outside, the sky's turning orange, right."

Mmm, she's right. The sky outside the window was slowly turning to red. That means...if this isn't some miracle that had me go back in time, I've been sleeping for almost an entire day.

"Still, what is your body even made out of, Jirou."

"Where did that come from?"

"I mean, you got hit by a large truck, and if you're lucky, you might even get discharged today. That's what the nurse just now told me. Or, do the people working here just hate you that much?"

"...Well, something like that."

I was wondering why this place looked so familiar. This is the general hospital I was often brought to as a child. I was a regular here even, all thanks to my family's circumstances. As a result of that, most people here know my face. Though, they look at me like I'm some unfamiliar living being.

"For crying out loud, what extreme regenerative ability you have. Are you even human? Same goes for Kureha-chan as well, you normally don't heal a broken bone in two weeks."

"Really?"

"You're plenty weird, Jirou. The truck driver almost passed out from the shock after finding out you're still alive."

“That hurts. He should have at least been happy.”

“The young lady was worried you might have been injected with the T-Virus<sup>1</sup> or something.”

This ain't Biohazard.

“And, after you got treated here, your cold improved as well. We maybe should have called an ambulance from the very start.”

“Don't say that. Makes me think all my hard work and suffering was for nothing.”

And, I want to avoid being hospitalized if possible. I don't like staying here. Since ending up here was involved with a lot of pain when I was a small brat, I just don't have a good image about it.

“It'd be better if you come home soon. Kureha-chan is all depressed.”

“Depressed?”

Why? I'm safe, you know. Or, does she not want Konoe to go home? Was it that much of a shock? Hearing my question, even Konoe showed somewhat of a troubled expression.

“The thing is...Kojirou went home with his owner.”

“Wha?”

“Do you remember? Kojirou suddenly started running towards the highway, right. That was because he spotted his owner across the street.”

“.....”

“By the way, the owner is a young grade school girl, who was out searching for Kojirou as well. So, the stray Siberian husky made it back home safely.”

“...Huh.”

I see. That's why our home's princess is all depressed.

“I feel bad for her, really.”

“That bad?”

“Yeah. She was more shocked than when you collapsed, Jirou.”

“.....”

So that’s how much I mean to you?

“Well, that’s just her acting strong, I guess. She said that she wanted to come visit you today, but I told her to stay home for now. It might only put her down more coming here, but you won’t wake up at all.”

“Huh. Alright then, let’s go home.”

My body still hurt a bit, but it wasn’t anything that would stop me from leaving this place. I know that my healing abilities are no joke, after all I recovered this much in a single day.

“And, sorry that you had to come visit me, but I’m okay now. I’ll be back to my full glory soon enough...Not to mention that I have the will to live burning inside of me.”

“Hm? Are you looking forward to something, Jirou?” Konoe tilted her head, confused.

Haha, what are you talking about? I might have lost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of it, but today is the third of May, still Golden Week. From here on out, everything will go my way. Once I get home, I can relax. Even Kureha won’t torture me with her wrestling moves, I’m injured after all, and just got discharged from the hospital. Ahh, my own Golden Week is going to start...!

“It pains me to say it, but that won’t happen, Jirou.”

However, my hope was immediately crushed with the following sentence.

“After all, today is the 5th of May.”

“...Wat?”

...Alright, time-out. What did she just say?

“Here, look at my phone, you can check the date there.”

You’re kidding, right? I accepted Konoe’s phone and looked at the screen, only to find ‘May 5th’ written on there. Eh? What is this about? Since I’ve slept a full day, shouldn’t today be May 3rd?

“From your reaction, I guess you really don’t know. You were brought here on May 2nd, and slept for roughly three days.”

“Wha...”

“The doctor responsible for you said you weren’t in any grave danger, so you should probably wake up eventually, but I didn’t expect you to sleep this long, you damn sleepy head.”

“.....”

“That’s why, today is the last day of Golden Week, and school starts tomorrow. Aren’t you glad, not missing a day? Congratulations on being discharged.” Konoe announced, and clapped her hands together without creating a sound.

...This is too cruel. Don’t play me like that. What about my Golden Week...Can’t I just get hospitalized again...

“Anyway, I’ll be taking my leave now. I have some other business.”

“Other business?”

“Yeah, you’re not the only one who’s hospitalized right now.” Konoe must have been careful to not wake up Suzutsuki, as she calmly got up from her chair. “After you collapsed...Dad caught a cold, and was out cold as well.”

“.....”

...Hey now. Does that mean...

“I bet he must have gotten the cold from you, Jirou. After living beneath that bridge, his physical condition and mental health

worsened, which was probably the reason for him catching your cold, so he was hospitalized together with you. That's why, although I don't really want to...I should visit him."

"Phew, that's a shocker."

How miserable. But, we're talking about that old fart. I bet the biggest shock was being rejected by his own daughter, so he might just recover the second Konoe comes to visit him. That's how it should be. Maybe now their relationship will improve a bit. I bet Konoe was just being stubborn, but actually wanted to make up with her old man. After all...you never know how long you have those parents around.

Konoe should be aware of that. More than the average person.

"And, you don't need me nursing you back to health anymore."

"Hm."

That way of phrasing sure hurt a bit. I wonder why, maybe she's annoyed that I was so desperate in sending her home?

"But...I was happy."

"Eh?"

"Back then, you ended up in tatters, and yet told me 'I won't die', right. You were so desperate in trying to make me stop crying, I decided to...put trust in your words, your promise."

"...Konoe."

"But, keep in mind..." She took a deep breath. "I'll have you take responsibility."

"Responsibility?"

"Yeah. Please, don't break that promise. You're a precious...friend of mine. I don't want my friends to die. That's why—if you were to betray those words, and went off to die..."



—I will cry again.

Even now, Konoe looked close to breaking out in tears, but somehow managed to keep them back, as she announced these words.

“...Yeah.” I nodded as confident as I could.

I feel like she’s asking for some pretty ridiculous stuff right there, but I was the one who started this all, so I can’t help it. But...it’s fine. I know just fine. I definitely won’t make you sad again. For that, I need to get stronger.



“...Yeah...U-Um, Jirou.”

“Hm? What?”

Konoe’s cheeks turned red, as she fidgeted awkwardly. She stuttered a few times, but eventually managed to properly move her mouth.

“—Thanks!”

She left behind these words of gratitude, spoken to the best of her ability despite it being a bit awkward, and left the room.

“...Thanks, huh.”

Still sitting on my bed, I repeated the same words Konoe just told me. How do I say this...it's unbelievable to me. To think that this Subaru-sama, who is known for her blunt and cold behaviour, would thank a classmate of hers like this.

“...Why am I feeling so ticklish?” My chest felt fluffy, and restless.

It's an odd feeling. Even though she simply gave me her thanks, my heart is racing to no end. Maybe I really got another cold? I could only look at the door Konoe left through in a daze, pondering about this feeling inside my chest, when...

“...Huh, that's a rare sight.” A dignified voice rang out inside the room.

In shock, I turned towards the voice, and found Suzutsuki on the chair, her eyes opened as she smirked at me.

“Y-You, since when have you been awake?”

“Don't cause a ruckus. She just got a break', I guess.”

So from the very beginning. Ahh, what a blunder. To think that komodo dragon had to hear my muttering. She'll definitely threaten me with this later.

“Still, it really is unbelievable...To think that Subaru would say 'Thanks' to someone but me. Not too long ago, that would have been unthinkable.” She took off the blanket covering her body, and smiled.

See, that's what I mean. I really didn't want this damn rich lady to hear my muttering.

“But...after being shown such a thing, I can't blame her.”

“Eh?”

Hearing these words from Suzutsuki's mouth surprised me.

"When you got hit by that truck, drenched with blood, you still tried your best to convince Subaru. You were different from usual—for a short moment, you weren't just some chicken bastard."

"Huh? What's that supposed to mean. You teasing me? Ah, you're probably pissed because of that 'Move' before, right."

Thinking about it, I must have sounded pretty cold. We're talking about that young lady, she probably isn't used to receiving such a harsh tone.

"—You're right. That was the first time a man said something like that to me."

I wonder why, but Suzutsuki slowly started crawling onto my bed. And not just onto it, but also towards me.

"Now that we're talking about that, how is your gynophobia coming along? Has living together with Subaru helped you with that?"

"Hm? Ah, yeah, I think so. I can at least touch a woman now."

A lot happened after all. Sparring, that incident in the bath, and so on. It's not completely gone for real, but I at least can handle myself around a girl now.

"Hmm, I see."

Listening to my words, Suzutsuki must have thought of something, as she started smiling. And then, she suddenly moved closer towards me.

"Then, should we try it out?"

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"Isn't that obvious? I want to test how much you've gotten used to girls."

It was...an abrupt incident. Without any warning or signal, Suzutsuki

—pressed her lips on mine.

“...!?”

Unable to comprehend what just happened, I just reflexively jumped off the bed. My nose was bleeding. As expected, being touched by a girl activated my gynophobia...But, there's more pressing problems than that right now.

“Oh my, this is worse than I had anticipated. Since you still get a nosebleed from something like this, it appears as if our relationship as partners in crime will continue for a lot longer.” Suzutsuki smiled, acting like nothing happened.

“You...y-y-you! What are you doing!?” My tongue wouldn't move as I wanted it to.



Also...what, eh? Was that just now...

“Why are you so flustered? It was just a kiss.”

“Waaaaaaah!”

She actually said it out loud! Not to mention with no hesitation!

“It’s just a bit of skinship. They do that all the time overseas.”

“Shut up! We’re in Japan!”

“Ever heard of globalization?”

“Like hell I care! I’d rather have Japan isolate itself again then! Not to mention...!”

“Not to mention?”

“Didn’t you say that Konoe was your first love!?”

That’s right, this rich lady should have feelings for Konoe Subaru. So, why would she kiss a classmate despite having someone she likes?

“Don’t get the wrong idea. I still love Subaru as much as before. However—” She grinned. “A first love is a first love. There’s no guarantee that it will continue, right?”

She said it like there’s no problem to whomever she may be kissing now. Not to mention that she stuck out her red tongue, smiling.

“.....”

You’re kidding. This is a lie. Please tell me that I’m still dreaming. After all, that just now was my first...

“By the way, that was my first kiss.”

“Wha...”

As I was falling deeper into despair, she just showed me a teasing grin, like a true devil.

“I’ll be going home now.” She acted like nothing happened, as she headed towards the door.

I thought she just wanted to run away, but right before stepping out, she turned around, which had her black hair flutter.

“Bye, Jirou-kun.”

Elegantly, with a beautiful face enough to make my heart skip a beat, she announced these words. And then, almost like she was singing her favorite song, she continued.

“See you at school tomorrow.”

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<sup>1</sup> Another reference to Resident Evil, this virus turns peeps to super mutants (iirc)





# Afterword

It's been a while! I'm Asano Hajime, the guy who lost his beloved down jacket the other day. It happened when I had it cleaned a while back, and when I got there to pick it up, I was told 'Our sincerest apologies, we seem to have misplaced your down jacket'...

"Misplaced? What's that about!?" is what I retorted, to which the employee silently pushed a banknote onto me.

*I-Is he telling me to buy a new one?* I thought, and although I was still bewildered, I couldn't withstand the pressure coming from the employee, so I was forced to leave the store. However, right on my way out:

"Ah, we do need that money back in case we find out jacket- We sadly don't have an estimate when that might be the case though~"

"....."

I couldn't say anything to that. With a mumble of 'Kanagawa at night sure is cold...', I walked along the asphalt with quivering legs. However, I won't give in to life just because of that! After all...the second volume of [Mayo Chiki!] was greenlit after all!

I would have never imagined that this fact would arrive so soon. This really is thanks to all of you dear readers who picked up my book. Thank you very much! I bet that even my down jacket must be crying tears of joy for me somewhere in this concrete jungle!

Now then, let's talk about the second installment of this male butler uniform-type romcom. The concept this time was 'A butler came to my place!'. This might sound like some advertisement of an Internet company, but rest assured, this is simply a story of Subaru invading Jirou's home. I've made sure to develop their respective human relationships throughout this second volume, so I highly suggest you buy it if you haven't already. I expect a professional touchdown on the cash register right after you finish reading this afterword.

And, with the release of this second volume, I need to thank a lot of people. First, my editor Shouji-sama. I'm sorry for sending you the 'That necktie is crazy!' email about the cover illustration, which ended up completely uncovering my fetishes. I'm in your care in the future as well.

Following this, Kikuchi Seiji-sama, who has created all these wonderful illustrations that really brought the characters to life. The cat-eared Subaru in the color illustrations is almost too much for me to handle! Thank you very much for your work while you're so busy.

To the dear president of the editorial department Misaka-sama, everyone from the editorial department, all the wonderful people who helped in printing and selling this book, and all the newcomer contest winner colleagues who made time to give me advice, I thank you very much. [Mayo Chiki!] is something I definitely wouldn't have been able to create on my own, and these days will continue.

To all of you who picked up this novel, thank you so much. I've received a lot of positive messages about the novel itself, or my story about the driving school graduation anecdote, which really supported me while writing this second volume. I will try my hardest to repay you for all the support.

Finally, a bit of a preview, but in the event that I am allowed to write a third volume, it will deal with the school festival. We'll have a new character, which brings a new mix to the other characters' daily lives.

In hopes of being able to meet all of you again, I will be stepping on the gas pedals with no brakes, so please continue to support me.

Asano Hajime



# Credits

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